SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 375. FOR WEEK ENDING MARCH 7TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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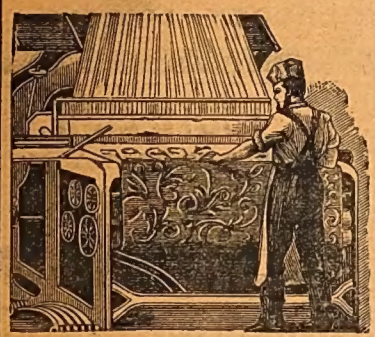

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£100
COUPON.
No. 10
Mar. 7, 1896.
S.S. S.S.

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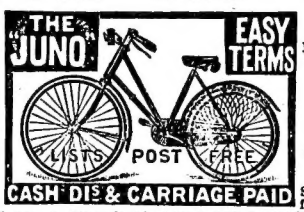

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Advertisements should be sent to "Short Stories" Advertisement Department, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

ONE PENNY

SHORT STORIES.

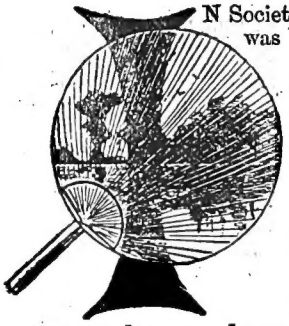
EDITED BY

C. ARTHUR PEARSON

No. 375.] For the Week ending March 7th, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

Was He a Coward?

Translated from the French of Guy de Maupassant.



IN Society they called him "Adonis Querne." His name was Viscount Gontran de Querne.

An orphan, and master of a large fortune, he made quite a figure, as they say. He had style, readiness enough to appear witty, a certain natural grace, a proud, well-bred bearing, a fierce moustache, and a gentle eye—the combination women like.

He was invited everywhere, was in demand as a partner at a dance, and inspired men with the smiling unfriendliness that a strong face usually begets. He was suspected of a few love affairs that go to make a bachelor interesting. He was happy, calm, and self satisfied, known to be an expert swordsman, and a good shot.

"If I ever fight a duel," he used to say, "I shall choose pistols. I shall be sure then of killing my man."

One evening he went to the theatre with two ladies and their husbands, and after the play invited them to go to Tortoni's for an ice. When they had been seated there for a few minutes, he observed that a gentleman at a neighbouring table was keeping his eyes obstinately fixed on one of the ladies of de Querne's party. She seemed troubled and uncomfortable, and held her head down. Finally she said to her husband:

"That man is staring at me. I don't know him, do you?"

The husband, who had seen nothing, looked up, but said at once: "No, not at all."

The young wife continued, half smiling, and half annoyed:

"It's very provoking; that individual spoils my ice for me."

Her husband shrugged his shoulders: "Pshaw! Pay no attention to him. If we took notice of every loafer we met there'd be no end to it."

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But the Viscount rose abruptly.

He would not permit a strange man to spoil an ice of his offering. The insult was to him, since it was by his invitation that his friends were at the café. The thing devolved upon him to settle.

He approached the man and said to him:

"Sir, I cannot tolerate your manner of staring at these ladies. I beg you will desist."

The other replied:

"Do you want to make a row about it?"

The Viscount set his teeth and continued: "Be careful, sir, or you will provoke me beyond bounds."

The man answered by a single word, a vile name that rang from one end of the café to the other, and had the effect of a spring on every one at the tables.

Everyone turned round, the three waiters spun on their heels like tops, the two *dames du comptoir* jumped and then leant forward to see, and a great silence fell. Then all at once a sharp sound cut the air. The Viscount had struck his adversary in the face. Everybody rose to interfere. The two men exchanged cards.

* * * * *

When the Viscount reached home he walked up and down his room, too agitated to reflect. The single idea of a duel hovered in his mind, but without awakening the smallest emotion. He had done as he ought; shown himself as he wished to be. He would be talked about, approved, congratulated.

He repeated aloud as we often speak when the mind is wrougl t up: "What a brute that man was."

Then he sat down to think. In the morning he must find his seconds. Who should they be? Men of position and standing! He finally chose the Marquis de la Tour-Noire and Colonel Bourdin, a great lord and a soldier; their names would look well in the newspapers. He felt thirsty and drank three glasses of water, one after the other: then he began to walk up and down again. He felt very determined. If he showed himself bold and resolute, insisted on rigorous conditions, and demanded a serious duel, a duel to the death, probably his adversary would withdraw and apologise.

He took up the card he had drawn from his pocket and thrown on the table and read it, as he had already read it at a glance in the café and in the cab coming home by the light of every street lamp:

George Lamill,
51, Moncey Street.

Nothing more.

He examined the way the letters followed each other. George Lamill! Who was he? What did he do? Why had he stared at the woman? How revo'ting that a stranger, an unknown man, should trouble the course of your existence suddenly, because he chose to look insolently at a woman. The Viscount repeated aloud:

"What a brute!"

Then he stood motionless awhile, in a sort of trance, his eyes fixed on the card. Rage was awakening in him against the piece of pasteboard, a rage mingled with hate, and with a strange feeling of uneasiness. The whole affair was idiotic! He took an open penknife and stuck it into the printed name as if he were stabbing somebody.

So he was going to fight a duel! Should he choose swords or pistols, for he considered himself the insulted person. With swords he ran less risk, but by choosing pistols he had the chance of making his adversary withdraw. A duel with swords is rarely fatal; mutual prudence keeps the combatants too far apart. With pistols he seriously hazarded his life; but he might also get off with all the honours of the situation and without any meeting.

He spoke aloud:

"I must be firm. He will be frightened."

The sound of his voice made him shiver, and he glanced round. He felt very nervous. He drank another glass of water, undressed, and went to bed.

In bed, with the lights out, he closed his eyes and began to think:

"I have all day to-morrow to attend to things. I must go to sleep now, so as to have my head clear."

The covering seemed oppressive; he could not fall asleep. He turned over and over, lying five minutes on his back, then on his right side, then on his left.

He felt thirsty again. He rose to get a drink. Then a genuine anxiety seized him:

"Am I afraid?"

Why did his heart beat so wildly at all the familiar sounds in the room? When the clock was going to strike, the little click of the spring made him start, and he was obliged to open his mouth to breathe for several seconds after, he felt so oppressed. He began to reason with himself on the possibility of such a thing:

"Am I afraid?"

No, assuredly he could not be afraid when he had just announced himself resolved to push the thing to extremity, when he had such a determination to fight. But he was so deeply moved that he said to himself:

"Can one be afraid in spite of one's self?"

And the doubt grew upon him—an anxiety, a dread; if a force stronger than his will overcame him, what should he do? He would go to the place of meeting, because he willed to appear there. But if he trembled? If he lost consciousness? And he thought of his position, his reputation, and his name.

He felt a compelling wish to see his own face in the mirror. He lighted a candle. When he saw his reflection in the polished glass he hardly recognised it, it was like one he had never seen. His eyes looked enormous, and he was pale; he was certainly very pale.

He stood there before the mirror. He even looked at his tongue to see if he were feverish, and all at once the thought shot through him:

"The day after to-morrow, at this time, I may be dead."

And his heart began to beat furiously again.

"The day after to-morrow this, that I see in the glass, may be no more. I am here, I look at myself, I feel that I am alive, and in twenty-four hours I may be laid on that bed dead, my eyes closed, cold, inanimate, ended!"

He went back towards his bed, and could see himself stretched out on his back on the very sheets he had just left. His face had fallen in like a dead man's, and his hands were leaden as if they would never move again.

He hated his bed, and in order not to see it went into his smoking-room. He mechanically lighted a cigar and began to walk about. He felt chilled, and was about to ring for his servant, but he paused with his hand raised above the bell:

"The fellow will see that I am afraid."

He did not ring, he built a fire himself. His hands trembled a little with a nervous recoil when they touched anything. His mind wandered; his confused thoughts began to grow fleeting, broken off, and painful; fumes clouded his mind as if he had been drinking.

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He repeated continually:

"What shall I do? What will become of me?"

His whole body vibrated, shaken by chills; he rose, and going to the window, opened the curtains. Day was breaking—a summer day. The flushed sky warmed the roofs and walls of the city. A long beam of light, like a caress from the rising sun, wrapped the awaking world, and with the light swiftly, and almost with the pain of a shock, hope sprang up in the Viscount's heart! What a fool he was, to be overcome with fear before anything was decided, before his seconds had seen George Lamill's, before he even knew there would really be a duel.

He dressed, and left the house with a firm step. He repeated to himself, as he walked:

"I must be very decided. I must prove that I am not afraid."

His seconds, the Marquis and the Colonel, consented to act, shook hands with him, and discussed the conditions.

The Colonel asked: "You are in earnest about the character of the duel itself?"

The Viscount replied: "Thoroughly in earnest."

The Marquis added: "You insist upon pistols?"

"Yes."

"Leave us to settle the rest."

The Viscount pronounced with dry, jerky articulation: "Twenty paces, at the word of command, raising the weapon instead of lowering it. Shots exchanged till there is a serious wound."

The Colonel remarked that they were excellent conditions, the Viscount was a good shot, and all the chances were on his side.

Then they went away, the Viscount returned home to wait for them. His agitation, which had lessened for a time, now increased every moment. He could feel that chill running along his arms, his legs, his chest, shaking his whole body. He could not sit still. There was not a trace of moisture in his mouth, and he continually made a little clacking sound with his tongue as if to moisten his palate.

He wished to breakfast, but could not eat. Then he thought drinking would give him courage, so he sent for a bottle of brandy, and drank six small glasses in succession. A burning heat rushed over him, accompanied by giddiness.

"I have it now," he thought, "this is the thing!"

But at the end of an hour he had emptied the bottle, and his agitation had become intolerable. He felt an insane desire to roll on the ground, to scream, to tear something with his teeth.

A jingling at the bell so excited him that he had not the strength to rise and receive his seconds.

He did not dare to speak to them, for fear they would guess all from his altered voice.

The Colonel spoke: "Everything is settled according to your own conditions. At first your adversary claimed the privileges of the offended person, but he yielded almost immediately and accepted everything. His seconds are two army officers."

The Viscount said: "Thank you."

"Excuse us if we only come in to go directly away, but we have a thousand things to arrange. We must have a good surgeon, as the duel goes on till there is a serious wound, and you know cold lead is no joke. We must find a place for the meeting near some dwelling, where the wounded man may be carried, if necessary, and so on. At least we have two or three hours to do it in."

Again the Viscount said: "Thank you."

The Colonel asked: "Are you all right? Not shaky?"

"Not at all, thank you."

The two men went away.

* * * * *

When he was alone again he believed he was going mad. The servant had lighted the lamps, so he sat down at the table to write letters. Having traced "This is my will" at the top of the page, he sprang up and walked down the room, feeling himself incapable of writing two ideas, of taking any resolve, or deciding upon anything.

What was it all? He was to fight a duel. He wished it, it was his settled intention; and yet he knew, in spite of every effort of his will, every assertion of his mind, that he was not going to have the necessary strength even to go to the place of meeting. He tried to fancy the duel, his own attitude, and his opponent's bearing.

From time to time his teeth chattered in his head. He took up Chateauvillard's duelling code and tried to read it. Then he asked himself:

"Has my adversary practised in shooting-galleries? Is he known? Has he reputation? How could I find out?"

He remembered Baron de Vaux's book on noted shots with the pistol, and went through it from beginning to end. George Lamill was not mentioned. But if the man was not an expert he would not have accepted at once that dangerous weapon under mortal conditions.

He opened a case of pistols, took out one and stood up as if to fire, raising his arm. He trembled from head to foot and the barrel wavered in every direction.

Then he said: "The thing is impossible. I cannot fight a duel like this."

He examined the little black hole in the end of the barrel that spits out death, and thought of disgrace, whispers in clubs, sneers in Society, women's contempt, allusions in the newspapers, insults from cowards.

He kept examining the weapon, and pressing back the trigger suddenly saw a cap under it like a little red flame. Through neglect the pistol had been put away loaded. It gave him a confused, inexplicable pleasure.

If he could not stand up before that man with calm, unblenching front, he would be lost, branded, outcast. He was not capable of assuming or keeping that impassive front, he knew it, he felt it. But he must be a brave man, because he wished to fight a duel! He must be brave since—the thought did not even shape itself clearly in his mind; he opened his mouth, put the barrel of the pistol down his throat and pulled the trigger.

When his valet rushed in, attracted by the report, he found him dead, lying on his back. The blood had splashed the white paper on the table and made a great red blot under the four words:

"This is my will——"

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I.

"WHAT a lovely face!" murmured Ernest Moore.

He was an artist to his finger-tips, and certainly the girl was charming. She was sipping her tea in the shade of a palm and the painter's trained observation noted that the glove that held the Sevrès cup had seen service on many days, and that she was the most plainly-attired woman in the fashionable crowd that thronged his cousin's drawing-room.

Lady Cameron caught the phrase in passing and smiled.

"I am glad you admire Helen. She is one of my pet *protégées*—a school-friend of Vera, you know. Her people lost their money a few years ago and they are horribly poor, I am afraid. It is positively dreadful when one thinks that a girl with her appearance should be obliged to go about in a last season's gown. It is such things," said her ladyship solemnly, "which make one wonder at the ways of Providence!"

Moore laughed.

"Do you want to be introduced?" she asked.

"What a question! Of course I do."

A moment later he had drawn a chair to the girl's side and was making himself agreeable to her with the tact of a well-bred man.

She must have known she was beautiful, and yet there was no trace of self-consciousness or affectation about her; the face lent her, in his mind, an added charm. Once, looking up suddenly, she flushed to find his eyes upon her face. He apologised quickly.

"You must think me an awful bore to stare at you so," he said. "Pray forgive me, Miss Winyard; I don't mean to be rude. The fact is I am a painter, and yours is just the type of face for a picture I have in my head. I would give ten pounds to find a model like you."

The conversation grew more personal after that, and unconsciously their voices dropped, so that they were practically *tête-à-tête* in a crowd.

She questioned him about his profession, and soon he found himself confiding to her more of his hopes and ambitions than a man usually confides to an acquaintance of half-an-hour.

When she rose at length to take leave of her hostess he shook hands with visible regret.

He was hard at work in his studio the next morning when a visiting-card, bearing her name, was brought to him.

His first sensation was pleasure, his second surprise. When she entered, and he noted that her lips were trembling with an embarrassment she could not conceal, his perplexity increased.

She gave him no time for conjecture anent her visit, but plunged into an explanation straightway.

"Mr. Moore," she said, with a nervous tremor in her voice, "I have come to ask you a favour. I dare say Lady Cameron has told you that we are very poor. My father is an invalid, and my brothers and sisters are young, so I am unable to leave home, although I am very anxious to earn a little money. Yesterday you said that you would give ten pounds to find a model like me. Mr. Moore, I am in urgent need of precisely that sum, so I have put false pride in my pocket, and come to ask you to let me be your model. If you did not mean what you said, and I can be of no use to you, don't mind telling me so. It is purely a business proposal that I put before you."

He spoke quickly, earnestly.

"I shall be delighted to paint you. I wish I could find words in which to thank you for offering me the chance. When would you give me a sitting? Would to-morrow, at eleven, suit you?"

"Oh, yes," she said; "all days are the same to me."

When she had gone he took up his brush again; but Mr. Moore's work for the rest of that morning was represented by three square inches of background, which he subsequently found cause to remove with a palette-knife.

He attributed his lack of appetite to overwork. Mr. Moore was mistaken; he was in love.

II.

THE picture was nearly finished, and it was the best thing he had done. He knew it, and rejoiced as he lingered tenderly over the last touches.

"It's good," he told Helen. "I'm sure of it, though I say it who shouldn't. It would be strange, wouldn't it, if my chance meeting with you should prove a stepping-stone to success?"

She didn't reply, and he stifled a sigh as he bent lower over the canvas.

It was not the first time that her lack of responsiveness had chilled him. Of late she had shown no trace of the sympathy which had charmed him on the day of the introduction.

"She dislikes me," he thought bitterly, "and she wishes me to see that our intercourse must remain on a business footing. When the picture is finished she will go away and forget me, and I—I shall remember her all my days."

She was to come to the studio the next morning for the last time, and when she had left him, the consciousness of it oppressed his spirits with a leaden weight.

Returning homeward he found a crowd and a couple

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of fire-engines in the street where he lived, and a cry escaped him, for the fire was at the studios, and his picture—the best work of his life—was in jeopardy, if not destroyed.

A fire-escape was forthcoming, and as he gained the outskirts of the crowd, a cheer arose, and a woman was borne in safety to the ground. In the flickering flames he saw her face distinctly.

"Helen!" he gasped. "Good Heavens! Helen!"

In an instant he had forced a passage to her side and thrown his arms about her. She was very white, and her trembling limbs seemed glad of his support.

"I've saved the picture for you," she murmured. "I called to tell you that I couldn't come to-morrow, and I knew how much you valued it, so I ran up and let it down from the window."

"Confound the picture!" he cried fiercely. "All the canvases in creation wouldn't console me for a burn on your little finger."

His voice deepened almost to a sob.

"Oh, my darling, you risked your life for me, and I thought you didn't care!"

"And *I* thought that you were so devoted to your art that the woman was forgotten in the model."

"We've been making ourselves miserable for nothing," he said, "but, please Heaven, we'll make up for wasted time."

Their lips were very close together. But perhaps it was only the flickering light that made it seem as though they touched. B. S. K.

Told by the Marquise.

THE room blazed with light; the air was heavy with perfume; the orchestra, behind its screen of flowers, softly droned the minor strains of a stately minuet.

"No, Jean, my friend," returned the Marquise sadly, "discretion is not, as you say, silence only. True discretion is renunciation of self—self-sacrifice in every emergency, no matter how terrible, that carries it even, always unsuspected, to the point of heroism. Listen. I've a story to tell you.

"You have heard people talk of him—Colonel Robert de Gedres; of his tall form, his handsome face, his indomitable bravery, and unswerving loyalty——"

"And between whom and yourself, if I mistake not, Marquise," Jean interrupted, "there was a talk of marriage till that unfortunate duel between his brother and your cousin Rocheverte created an impassable barrier between the families?"

Madame de Logerolles hesitated a minute, then shrugged her shoulders lightly.

"You know that, then?" she said. "*Eh, bien,* it does not matter. The story, I continue it. It was summer, near Rouen, where Robert de Gedres, then commandant of one of the regiments of the Garde, was in garrison, and when the better portion of the city's inhabitants, flying from the heat of the town, sought relief and freshness in the many superb villas and mansions abounding in the environs.

"One of the handsomest of these properties belonged to a household that I shall designate, for convenience of recital, M. and Madame de Lucenay. They were not Rouenais people or yet Parisians, only M. de Lucenay was a rabid sportsman, and the vicinity of Rouen, at that time gorged with game of every description, had seemed to him the place of all others to instal himself each year from July to November.

"If it pleased M. de Lucenay to run the woods with its keepers and dogs, and watch over its boars, rabbits, and goats, it did not give the same pleasure to the lady who bore his name. She cared but little for *ragouts* and solitude, an *ennui* shared by the better part of her neighbours, who, forced to depend upon each other for company, ended by becoming almost as one community. All day long, united in one or another of the many houses, they killed time together, and spent their evenings in precisely the same way in all the traditional amusements of the country.

"Towards dinner time the husbands arrived from Rouen, bringing with them always a number of guests, whose strongest contingent was drawn from the circle of Rouen officers, among whom the most brilliant and popular was incontestably Robert de Gedres.

"One evening, after a little impromptu ball where he, the Colonel, had danced a great deal with Madame de Lucenay, and she, after bidding her guests adieu, had returned to her chamber to prepare for bed, she was as astonished and startled both when the door brusquely opened and her husband hurriedly entered, clad in shooting garb and gaiters, and with a fowling piece swung over his shoulder.

"'Two wolves, my dear,' said he, 'two wolves just reported that all summer long have been eating up my lambs and goats, and for which I and Renard here have to-night laid and baited a trap. Sleep well; don't worry or look for me before morning. I'm late as it is, you know.'

"And with a hasty kiss upon his wife's brow and a call to the garde, arrayed like his master, and hat in hand awaiting his pleasure, the door banged to again, and M. de Lucenay, all haste and excitement, was off on his wolf hunt.

"The heat was stifling. Madame de Lucenay threw off her ball dress, slipped into a loose white gown, and passed to the balcony to look at the night and breathe the air awhile before going to bed. No breath of breeze, however, stirred the leaves, motionless and sad, and no sound rose from the plain and wood below but the dull, droning hum of nocturnal insects.

"Still heated and excited from the exertion of the evening and disinclined to sleep, it occurred to Madame de Lucenay presently that a walk in the garden, in the midst of the flowers and the clear light of the moon, would perhaps refresh and soothe her overstrained nerves.

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"To reach the garden you traversed a broad conservatory opening directly into the *salle-à-manger*, itself separated from the *salon* by a wide arch draped with a heavy *portière*, and so arranged that when space demanded it, as on this evening, the three chambers could be thrown into one."

"*Peste!* What precision of detail! You know the house, then, Marquise?" Jean again interrupted with a slightly significant smile.

"Certainly," returned the Marquise, and resumed her story.

"Madame de Lucenay," said she, "opened the heavy iron-bound door of the greenhouse, and passed into the shadow of a broad alley of chestnut trees that led around the house and skirted the terrace in front of it.

"She had scarcely taken a dozen steps, however, when she stopped, trembling convulsively. A low, supplicating voice had called her name. She turned; Robert de Gedres stood before her.

"'You!' she cried stupefied, 'and at such an hour! What brings you here, then?'

"'To see you,' responded he passionately. 'Nay, do not cry out, Germaine; God is my witness that two hours ago I did not dream of doing what I am doing now. On leaving you I walked on at random through the country. Suddenly from a cross-path, I saw your husband passing in hunting garb and with his garde and dogs, and a mad idea seized me. I turned, came back, and climbed the wall of the garden, without knowing what I was doing, and for nothing in the world but to be near you one moment, to regard only the windows behind which you slept.

"'Then all at once, you yourself stood before me—you, the phantom of my shattered happiness; and you would bid me still be silent, still shut in the heart that beats only for you the secret that stifles it! I cannot! It is impossible! Speak I must, Germaine!'

"Madame de Lucenay, stupefied by Robert's appearance and his passionate avowal of a love that now, through circumstances beyond their control, it was a crime even to remember, much less to speak of, had, step by step, recoiled from him, till both of them stood inside the greenhouse door. Scarcely, too, had the words left his lips, when she feverishly seized his arm.

"'Hear, hear!' she said breathlessly, bending her ear to listen.

"Through the silence of the night the sand of the lower alley crunched under the firm, alert step of a man—a man walking leisurely, and whistling a hunting air.

"'My husband,' murmured she, in a strangled voice. 'Ah, madman that you are, Robert, you have ruined us both!'

"'No,' said he briefly. 'He will enter the *salon* steps. I still have time.'

"'Yes, yes, perhaps; but go—go quickly, I beseech you!' Madame de Lucenay returned wildly.

"And pushing him towards the still open conservatory door, she brusquely closed it upon him, and staggered back through the *salle-à-manger*. It was time. M. de Lucenay was entering the *salon*.

"Naturally, at the sight of his wife, all pale and trembling, too, he stopped astonished. She explained hastily as well as she could. She was so warm, and coming down for a little air, his step had startled her somewhat; nothing serious, it would soon pass.

"'But you, Armand—what means this speedy return?'

"'The fault of those cursed wolves,' said he; 'there was no drive at all; they were in the trap of their own accord when Renard and I arrived. We killed them at once, without a second shot even. But you were going for air, you say, dearest; come, take my arm. We'll go out together for a little while.'

"'Willingly——,' began his wife, then stopped short, and sank half swooning into a chair beside her.

"The moon, flashing suddenly from the clouds that covered it, had shown her plainly through the greenhouse door, an instant lighted up, the pale, anxious face of Robert de Gedres. One instant visible, the next moment lost in the night, as again the moon was veiled by the clouds.

"Behold what had happened.

"At the moment when Madame de Lucenay, terrified by the situation and the coming of her husband, pushed to the heavy, iron-bound door of the conservatory upon the Colonel, she had closed it so quickly and firmly that she had caught between it and the frame the index finger of M. de Gedres' right hand.

"At that moment M. de Lucenay entered the *salon*. In spite of his agony, Robert de Gedres had strength enough to restrain a cry, though suffering a torture that for a moment made it seem as if he must swoon outright. As soon as he could for the pain and faintness, he sought to extricate his hand and return as he had come.

"But, alas! a more cruel pang still warned him that he was not free to go; that the iron mountings of the door clung still by a strip of flesh to his broken finger and held him a prisoner.

"Again, at the same moment, the raised voice of M. de Lucenay, proposing to lead his wife to the garden, reached him through the glasses, and, by the dim light burning in the *salon* brackets, he saw him extend his arm and his wife rise to accept it.

"In one blinding flash all the consequences of his mad act were seared upon his brain, all the drama that was going to pass, the horrible scandal, the right to justice that the husband would demand for a fancied outrage; and this woman, this irreproachable wife, whom with all his soul he loved in spite of the barriers between them, would be ruined, scandalised, possibly killed through him, who would willingly have died to save her.

"To save her! Ah, a thought had struck him—he could, he would save her!

"Fumbling feverishly in his pocket he drew out his knife, opened it with his teeth, and with one swift, unhesitating cut, the crushed bone and flesh were through, and Robert de Gedres, the bleeding stump wrapped in his handkerchief, disappeared in the night.

"Next morning, at roll-call, instead of the Colonel, a messenger arrived from the doctor, bringing the intelligence that M. de Gedres had greviously wounded himself that morning cleaning his revolver, and had gone, by his orders, to recover from the accident, to his country seat of Loupe Solange."

* * * * * *

Madame de Logerolles stopped. Jean wiped his moist brow.

"Zounds, Marquise," cried he, drawing a long breath to relieve the tension of his feelings, "that's a creepy story of yours, but if, as you say, De Gedres was so discreet, how did you come to know so by the card all the peripatetics of this adventure?"

The Marquise stood up briskly and smilingly.

"Jean, my friend," said she, "the cotillon and my story both are ended. Profit by it; be discreet, ask no question; and, above all, in thy love affairs never let thy finger be caught by the door." Aubrey L'Orr.

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When the Birds Begin to Sing

By Winifred Graham. *Author of "Through the Valley," "Six First-Class Passengers," etc.*

SUMMARY.

Philip Roche marries Eleanor Grebby, daughter of a farmer, and they spend their honeymoon on the Continent. On their return to Richmond, Eleanor becomes friendly with a frivolous widow, Mrs. Mounteagle, against her husband's wishes. She is introduced to Carol Quinton, who fascinates her. Her husband is heart-broken, and consults his cousin, Erminie Henderson, who comes to stay with them. Eleanor's parents come to spend a day or two with her, and disgust Mrs. Monteagle with their homeliness. Nelson Lane and Erminie are engaged. Each is led to think the other rich, but the deceit is mutual. In order to right themselves in one another's eyes, they each, unknown to the other, speculate in mining shares.

CHAPTER XI.

Slow and Sure Comes up the Golden Year.

Eleanor's face is seared with weeping.

For the last three days Philip has hardly spoken to her.

She has stayed indoors and avoided Giddy, but now a message comes from the widow commenting on her non-appearance.

She pulls forward a sheet of paper, bites the end of her quill, and cries great drops of tears on the blotting-book. In a straggling hand she addresses an envelope to Mrs. Mounteagle, placing therein that unlucky letter from Madame Faustine.

In as few words as possible she relates the scene on paper to her friend.

"I am disheartened, dispirited, disevery thinged," she writes in conclusion. "As Dick in 'The Light that Failed' says: 'I am down and done for—broken—let me alone!'"

"Poor little wretch!" thinks Giddy, reading the sorrowful epistle. "I must tell Carol. He shall see this forlorn-looking scrawl." She sighs at the thought of some people's folly. "No sooner met, but they looked," she quotes to herself, *apropos* of Eleanor and Mr. Quinton. "No sooner looked, but they loved; no sooner loved, but they sighed. Ah! me, it's very natural, very plain!"

* * * * *

Notices her pallor, and kisses her.

Erminie and Nelson Lane are returning from their honeymoon. They sought flight from their sorrows, but carried the burden of uneasy consciences throughout the tour.

Erminie has written to Philip to inform him of their return, and beg him to let her know if there is any rise in the "Klerksdorp" shares.

"Sometimes," she writes vaguely, "I have hunted in the papers to see them quoted, but never hit upon them. My anxiety is terrible. I begin to fear Nelson suspects I have something on my mind. He, too, has fits of depression, probably caused by my ill-concealed uneasiness."

"What is Erminie writing about?" asks Eleanor timidly, seeing Philip reading her letter.

"Only a business matter," he replies shortly, collapsing into silence.

"Is she back from her honeymoon?"

"They arrive to-night. You might go and see her to-morrow, Eleanor, for me, and take an important letter. Drive straight to Earl's Court and back; you can keep the carriage waiting." He speaks severely.

Eleanor agrees.

"I should like it very much. I have been so dull the last few days." But their latest quarrel is still so recent that Philip takes no notice of the remark.

Yet they are scarcely more wretched than the devoted couple who arrive that same evening in Trebovir Road, Earl's Court.

The following morning Erminie looks longingly for a letter from Philip, and her heart sinks heavily as she runs her eyes over her correspondence.

Nelson notices her pallor, and kisses her tenderly.

"The journey has tired you darling," he says. "You should have breakfasted in bed."

"Oh, no!" she cries with a strained smile. "I feel quite bright and frisky, thank you. But, Nelson dear, you look horribly knocked up."

Her husband pulls himself together. "It is only coming back to chilly England after the sunny South. I feel rather nipped, that's all."

He is thinking of the bitter task before him, for this is the day he has planned to return from the city a ruined man. He is going to his stockbroker to learn if any company has come to utter grief during his absence, in the success of which he will declare his whole fortune was at stake.

The lie grates on him, galls him, tortures him, though as yet it has not been uttered.

He feels like a criminal unworthy to look his fellows in the face—a traitor to his wife—a scoundrel, a hypocrite!

"Yes, I am all of these," he inwardly declares, "and

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more!" The sting of self-contempt is burning into his soul. He kisses Erminie hurriedly, and rushes confused and ashamed from the house, to reap the whirlwind of bitterly repented deceit.

Mrs. Lane scarcely perceives his strange demeanour. She thinks he is not very well, but her own mind being harassed by tormenting doubts, she lets him go without a murmur. It is well to be alive when the brain is burning with fiery suspense.

She dares not go out, for any moment a telegram may come from Philip deciding her fate.

She paces the room, with racking head and tingling nerves. Surely her sin is repaid a thousand times by the wretchedness of these waiting hours.

She searches the morning papers with trembling fingers, but finds nothing. Tears blind her eyes. The news must be bad, or Philip would have let her know.

"What demon possessed me?" she cries, wringing her hands. "What devil prompted me to that one false step—that base deceit?"

She shudders at the recollection of the gradually sloping path which led to the deep abyss.

The bell rings.

"A telegram!" she thinks hopefully.

The door opens. Mrs. Roche is announced.

"*Mrs.*, not *Mr.*!" Again the misery of waiting floods her soul, for Eleanor knows nothing of the Klerksdorp Mine.

"Good-morning, dear," she falters. "It is kind of you to come and welcome me home."

Eleanor kisses her affectionately.

"Dearest Erminie," she sighs, "how happy you must be. I've thought of you so often since the wedding. I expect you had a lovely time."

"Oh, yes; but," looking at Eleanor's wistful little face, "are you in trouble dear?"

Mrs. Roche sinks upon the sofa, and gazes tragically into the fire.

"Yes. My home life is wretched. We don't get on at all, Philip and I."

There are tears in her voice as she speaks.

"And I will try to help you, dear."

"I suppose it is all my fault. I am fond of amusing myself, and once I deceived him in a little matter. He found me out, Erminie, and was *furious*. It has all been quite different since."

Erminie's sympathetic nature yearns to comfort her little friend. The word "deceived" awakes a fellow feeling. She forgets her own grievances, and gathering Eleanor in her arms, kisses away her rising tears.

"It is so nice to be petted again," sighs Mrs. Roche, holding Erminie's hands. "What a dear, soft thing you are. I wish I always had you to console me."

"I shall come and see Philip very soon, and try to make you friends again. I dare say he is sometimes a little hasty without meaning it."

"We were so happy when you and Mr. Lane stayed with us. But things began to go wrong directly you left. I believe you are my mascotte, Erminie. You see Philip is very jealous and suspicious, and there is a friend of mine whom he especially abhors."

"Then why allow him to be your friend?"

"Oh, because he is so nice, and I like him."

"Then *don't*," says Erminie decisively.

"But I can't help it. We cannot regulate these things. They are like the weather, utterly beyond our control. We have to put up with hatred or love. I sometimes wonder which is the worst evil. If a married woman is only to have her husband for her friend——"

"*And* lover," puts in Erminie, looking Eleanor straight in the eyes. "Ah!

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child, I see the root now of all these dissensions. You could kill it, dig it out, cast it from you, with an effort of strong will. It is so easy to be weak—so splendid to be strong! I am not one to preach, for I have sunk low enough."

"*You!*" gasps Eleanor.

"Yes. I gave way to conceits and follies. I stooped to deceive, and I am suffering, and must suffer, in consequence. There, dear, don't sympathise; it makes me feel lumpy here," pressing her throat. "The least said the soonest mended."

"It seems as if no one could really be happy," says Eleanor dolefully.

"Oh, indeed they can, if they are good. Only the frail ones must endure the consequences of their errors. That is why I want you to draw up in time, not to let a passing fascination wreck the happiness of your home."

"You mean I ought never to see this man again," compressing her lips, and forcing back her tears.

"Not if he brings misery upon you and upon Philip."

"Why are the wicked people so much the pleasantest, the nice things wrong, the sweets indigestible, and the nasty uninteresting porridge wholesome? I have seen so much of the 'porridge' of life—the deadly respectable, the limited propriety. Erminie, I am afraid I was born bad. I am one of those natures that fall, and cannot help themselves. Bah!" rising and staring down at her friend with frightened, bloodshot eyes. "It is those poisoned arrows again—the air is full of them. Do you know what I mean by poisoned arrows? They are the sins that stick into you, and leave their venom before you can wrench them out. They get through the chinks of your armour, though you think you have buckled it on ever so safely. Once they have stabbed your flesh you are never the same again—always sick and uneasy, fretful, reckless, dissatisfied. I have not got one, but a thousand. Oh, Erminie, what am I saying?"

She sinks on the hearthrug, buries her face in her hands, and sobs.

"You are excited and overwrought," says Erminie, raising her gently.

"It does me good to speak out to you," cries Eleanor, like a weary child.

"And I will try to help you, dear. Together we will cure those ugly wounds—fight the temptations, and lay them low. Whenever you have these feelings, just come and tell them to me. It is not so black and impossible as your poor little brain imagines. You will be a far better woman for having been put to the test and tried. I know you *can* conquer the arrows of sin, and it will widen your character, strengthen your virtues; for though there are dark shadows on the earth, its lights are stronger in the contrast."

"I like to hear you talk so," says Eleanor, smiling through her tears. "It gives me confidence. I believe I shall go back and do better. I feel quite fortified when you put your arms round me so lovingly, and tell me to be good. Oh, Erminie, don't let me go to the bad! I am so young yet."

The pitiful ring of sincerity in Eleanor's voice touches Erminie more deeply at this point.

She holds her tighter to her heart, whispering words of encouragement.

"I shall have to go and see your husband this afternoon on business in the City, unless I get a telegram from him," says Erminie, when Eleanor is calmed and happier.

"Oh! I forgot, dear," feeling in her pocket. "I have a letter from him for you. That is really why I came. Only I was so miserable I forgot all about it."

Erminie's heart stops beating as she takes the envelope. For a moment she dares not open the longed-for missive. What if its news is ill?

The room swims round as she breaks the seal. Her hands are trembling, her teeth chatter.

The words dance up and down before her eager vision.

DEAREST ERMINIE,—Let me congratulate you. Your shares in the Klerksdorp Mine have gone to 30s. apiece. What do you say to that?

Yours relievedly,
PHIL.

Erminie makes a quick calculation, the letter falls from

And skips around the room.

her hand with a cry of joy, she leaps to her feet, and skips around the room.

"What is the matter?" asks Eleanor wonderingly.

"Oh, nothing—nothing very much," she laughs exultantly. "Don't think me too horribly mercenary, but I've had such a stroke of luck it has nearly turned my brain. I put £2,000 in the Klerksdorp Estate Mining Company. I got 10,000 shares at four shillings each, and they have become worth £15,000."

"How lovely!" exclaims Mrs. Roche. "Oh, Erminie, I am so glad!"

"I can't believe it, I fear to wake and find it all a dream. You don't know what this money means to me, how I have prayed for it, longed for it, watched for it!"

"Really!"

Eleanor's tone of surprise brings Erminie back to her senses. They really are shattered for the moment with the joy of the shock.

"I ought not to have told you," she says.

"Why?"

"Because no one is to know, not even my husband."

"Don't you approve of speculations? Were you doing it under the rose?"

"Yes, that is it," laughs Erminie gaily. "I am so dreadfully goody-goody that I look on the Stock Exchange as a gambling den not to be encouraged. Now promise me, dear, on your word of honour, never to mention my Klerdsdorp spec. to Nelson."

"Of course I won't if you don't wish it, but the sight of your pleasure has put me in quite high spirits. I shall go on my way rejoicing."

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"And no more tears, mind!" says Erminie. "Won't you lunch with me?"

"No, thanks, dear. The carriage is waiting, and I did not intend to stay so long."

"Come and see me very often, whenever you feel inclined for a little lecture and a little love. I shall always understand!"

As Eleanor drives away, Erminie rushes out and buys an armful of flowers to decorate the house for Nelson's return, sends an ecstatic wire of gratitude to Philip Roche, and gives the crossing-sweeper half-a-crown.

In the meanwhile, her husband is with his stockbroker, talking casually about shares, with the object of discovering a reason for his ruin.

"How have things been lately?" he asks vaguely "Any big venture gone smash since my absence?"

"No; everything has flown up like wildfire. Never knew such times. We have all been making our fortunes."

Nelson sighs.

"I wish I had."

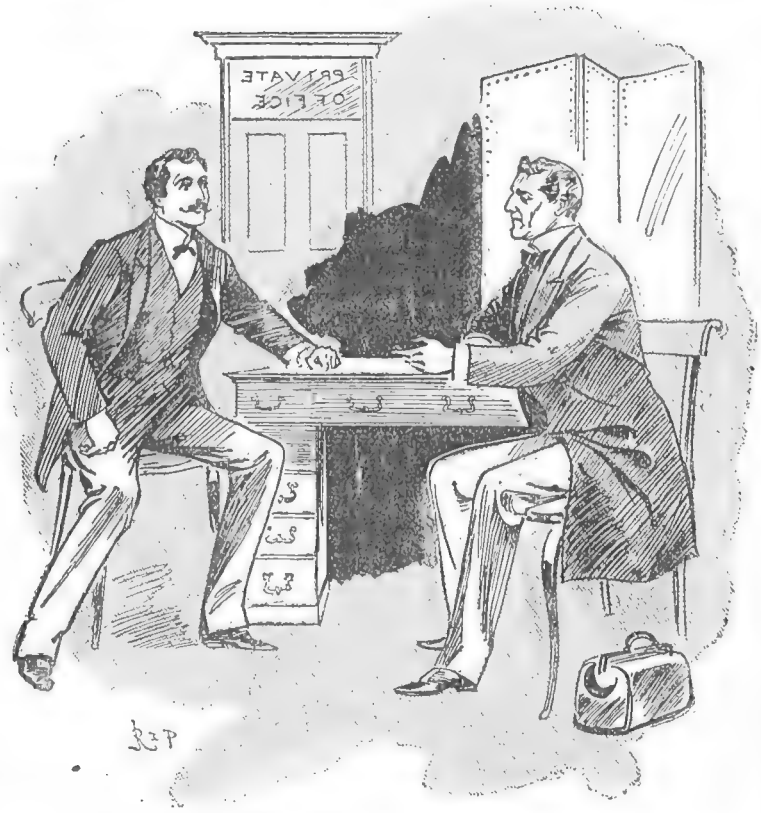
"Take for instance," continued his broker, "the Golden Link Mine—look at that! Why, those shares——"

"Eh! What?" asks Nelson, sitting bolt upright, and staring at the man before him. "Did you say the Golden Link Mine?"

"Yes, those shares were bought by some people for 2s. 6d. Only think of it—half-a-crown apiece!"

He shrugs his shoulders at the recollection, but does not see the nervous excitement suddenly paralysing Nelson Lane.

"What are they now?" he asks, when he has breath enough to speak.



"Eh! What?" asks Nelson.

"Why, £5 a share! It is positively sickening. And I might have been in it!"

During moments of great excitement Nelson turns to stone. He cannot show his inward joy by the outward signs of other men. He has one of those peculiar natures that reserve the best things for their own appreciation, never flaunting them before the world.

His very soul surges with untold delight, his spirits leap within him, his head swims.

Then he rises from his chair, saying in his most ordinary tones:

"Really! That is good hearing. I shall have made £40,000."

* * * * * *

Erminie hears his light step in the hall.

"Darling, has the day seemed long?" he cries, clasping her to his heart.

His eyes are intensely bright, his lips smile.

Erminie laughs merrily.

"How well you look!" she says.

"I thought you would like to go out to-night, dearest," he replies, "so I bought a box at the Lyceum."

"How delightful of you! The same idea struck me, and I took two stalls for the Gaiety."

"Never mind, we'll do both, the first act of a heavy tragedy, and wind up with a chorus, and dancing, and jollity."

* * * * *

"Nelson will never know," thinks Erminie gratefully. "Oh, how much I have to be thankful for!"

As she prays on her knees that night her prayers are all thanksgiving for the good fortune that has been hers.

* * *

"Thank Heaven I can look my wife in the face and feel that she will never suspect, never know!" sighs Nelson, as he, too, murmurs a heartfelt prayer in the silence of his soul.

CHAPTER XII.

IF WE ONLY KNEW! IF WE ONLY KNEW!

ELEANOR is not going out this afternoon, though the air is mild, the sun shines, and all the world smiles.

She has more than one call to return, which should have been done to-day, yet she sits alone in her pretty boudoir, neither reading, working, nor writing.

Her expression renders her face even more beautiful than usual in the subdued light. For a ray of winter sunshine, heralding the spring, has quite dazzled Eleanor's eyes, till she draws the blind, and settles in a cosy corner at the side of the fender.

In her hand is a letter, brief, yet to its owner teeming with news, so significant the simple wording seems.

"Why this silence? Stay at home to-day. I *must* see you."

It is neither commenced nor signed, but written in Carol Quinton's familiar hand.

Surely there is something imperative about that "Stay at home to-day." No "please," or "will you?". Merely the bare command. True the *must* is underlined, and the question savours of anxiety as to her reticence in writing or meeting him again.

Well, he shall come, since this is to be the end.

Better face the matter out; it is dangerous dodging poisoned arrows. She will try how her shield works, that is to glance them aside.

Determination is in her heart, and courage in her eye. Erminie's words still ring in her soul. "It is so easy to be

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weak, so splendid to be strong!" Eleanor is worked up into a fever of virtuous indignation at the remembrance of all she has allowed Quinton to do and say in the past. This is to be the turning point in her life. She will be loyal to her husband, and her first pure love, she will show him that she is capable of sacrifice, a woman to be trusted, looked up to, reverenced. Carol Quinton shall never enter her doors again after this call, never see her, hear from her, speak to her. She will fade from his life, as a shadow, a phantom! The sting of sorrow, the bitterness of thus casting a love she treasured to the wind, is subdued in a measure by a sense of exhilaration, at the thought of her good resolve.

Already "virtue's own reward" seems in her grasp, her heart is lighter, her spirit does not quail. She is tasting perhaps a shred of the martyr's joy, when they suffered in the cause of right, she is battling down that weaker nature and gaining a victory in advance.

She is impatient for the moment to arrive when Carol shall stand before her to learn his fate, his isolation, from her lips. No pity, no glimpse of feeling, no suspicion of sentiment is to creep into this day's farewell. He will leave her for ever with the ordinary hand-shake of a casual acquaintance. Yes, she is nerved, strong, sure!

It has taken Eleanor three nights of sleepless vigil to overcome her love and stamp it out. She has not reached this point without a struggle.

She listens eagerly for him to come, longing for the interview to commence and end, while a spirit of heroism is upon her, laying her lower nature in the dust.

"Down! you shall never rise again," she cries. "Oh! why is he so long? I want him *now*. I could do it *now*. After to-day I shall have swept the temptation from my path, and made it impossible for Carol Quinton to be my friend."

The bell rings—the outer bell. She staggers to her feet.

The brown chrysanthemum in her belt falls to the ground and lies unheeded.

How she trembles! Her face, too, is deadly pale, revealed in the mirror opposite. She sways like a flower blown in a gale. There is a prayer on her lips, an angel knocking at her heart.

The door opens, and Sarah enters with the tea-tray.

Eleanor sinks on the sofa, the reaction leaving her faint and powerless to speak.

She watches the tea-table brought forward, the hot scones placed by the fire.

At last she regains her composure.

"Who was that at the front door, Sarah?"

"Mr. Quinton, ma'am."

"Mr. Quinton! Why did you not show him in?".

Eleanor leans forward breathlessly, looking Sarah up and down.

The maid crimsons, and replies:

"If you please, it was master's orders. He told me to say 'not at home' when Mr. Quinton called."

A moment's pause, during which Mrs. Roche struggles with her self-control.

Then in a calm voice she says:

"Very well, Sarah; that is all."

She raises the teapot with an effort, pouring out the brown fluid jerkily.

As the door closes, she covers her face with her hands, rocking to and fro.

"He does not trust me," she cries fiercely, all that is evil kindling to life within her. "He slights and insults me, lowers me before my own servants. He dares to shut his doors against my will, to the man who is my friend. He treats me like a captive, a slave. Oh! Philip, you do not know what you have done to-day? You do not guess how much this want of faith may cost you.

"I was so strong, till you threw me back, so sure, till you treated me like this!"

Eleanor realises how the shock of Philip's order has been the death-blow to her good resolves. A sudden hatred of her husband leaps in to her heart and brain, choking her.

She feels like a hunted stag.

"A little confidence, a little love," she murmurs. "They are small things to ask at Philip's hands, yet he holds them from me in his cold reserve and suspicious dread."

Her eyes are dry and bright, her throat is parched, her forehead burns.

What will Carol think? Carol will be sorry, but not angry, Carol is always kind, considerate, forgiving. The dangerous fascination of imagination steals over her. Carol is at her side in a waking dream, but the scene is very different to the one she had contemplated. She fancies he is kneeling as once before by the same sofa, murmuring again those wild, impassioned words. She bends to grasp his hands and raise him from the grovelling adoration to her own level. They are just a man and woman—soul to soul, clay; ah! yes, of the earth earthly.

She breaks into a low laugh which ripples round the room, and seems to die away in something like a sob.

What is this rising tumult in her heart?

She cannot analyse her mood, it seems as if a certain knowledge has broken in like a flood of light upon her dim reason.

"Who can prevent me loving him, who can hold me back if I will it, if I choose?"

The door re-opens. Sarah enters with one of Mrs. Mounteagle's little scented notes upon a salver.

DEAREST ELEANOR,—If you are in, just toddle round to tea like a darling. I have some delicious toasted buns, and I want you to come and eat them. Don't put on gloves.

Your all impatient,
GIDDY.

It is intolerable sitting in alone, fuming over her wrongs

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and acting a drama with her imagination. Philip detests Giddy. She will pay him out and go.

Glad of anything to divert the current of her thoughts, she snatches up a small fur cap in the hall, which rests becomingly on Eleanor's wealth of waving hair. Flinging a long red cloak around her, she slips out of the house, and rings at the widow's door.

"I hope she is alone. I don't feel in the mood to compass Bertie's inane conversation," thinks Mrs. Roche as the flaxen maid shows her in.

The twilight has gathered, but there is no lamp, as Giddy rustles forward in a lavender tea-gown to greet Eleanor.

"You are a very bad child," she says, holding up her finger, "but we've found you out, and shown you up most shockingly. What right have you to break hearts, as if they were only *bric-à-brac*, and say 'Not at home' when you were probably gourmandising over that huge Buzzard cake we ordered in town?"

Eleanor cannot speak, for Carol Quinton rises, and looks reproachfully into her eyes. She feels like a hunted stag, and yet she is glad—relieved.

"There! now you are in a hole," continues Giddy, laughing, "with no time to invent a plausible excuse. But come and sit down and ask forgiveness. I dare say Carol will get over it."

As yet Eleanor has not spoken. She walks like one in a trance to the quaint old chair.

Mrs. Mounteagle draws forward. She sits down mechanically and gazes at the colours in the carpet, just as she did once before at the Butterflies' Club.

"What a poor little world it is!" she thinks; "just like a muddy, narrow lane, through which its puppets drive or run, with the dirt thrown up in their faces at every turn."

"Come! do not look so glum over it," coos Giddy, removing Eleanor's cloak. "Carol knows as well as I do what a row you have been in, and how rusty Mr. Roche has turned. We are both most terribly sorry for you. I am sure I don't know how you stand him. It does so remind me of my late husband, from whom I was separated by mutual agreement two years before his death. Our quarrels began much in the same way.

"I preferred a will of my own, and meant to have it. He would have treated me like the chickens cooped up in the yard—a useful addition to his table, only their part was the most enviable. I should not have minded being cooked and roasted, for there my sorrows would have ceased."

"Death must be very pleasant," says Eleanor slowly, her head turning lightly to the alluring charms of suicide.

"No doubt, when you are old and ugly. But at present life is what you have got to consider, my dear."

"Life and buttered buns," replies Eleanor drily, as Mrs. Mounteagle hands the dish. "No, thank you, Giddy. I don't want any tea."

Her voice trembles with agitation, as Carol, who has never taken his eyes off her, draws a little nearer.

"If you won't eat anything, dear," murmurs Giddy, "at least you must drink something just to settle your nerves. Suction is so much more romantic than mastication."

But Eleanor shakes her head.

"I am going to play peacemaker," declares Mrs. Mounteagle, "and leave you two to make it up. I have an important letter to write, which must catch the half-past five post. You owe Carol an apology, and that is always difficult in the presence of a third party."

Eleanor is about to demur, when she catches Mr. Quinton's expression, and his look withers the words on her tongue, and forces them back.

She only stammers: "Don't be long," and collapses into silence.

Giddy's important letter is addressed to the Fur Store. She orders the muff.

* * * * * * *

If things have been going badly at "Lyndhurst" before the day on which Philip makes his fatal error, they do not bear comparison with the bad times that follow.

Even Erminie's sweet influence cannot bring peace to the ill-conditioned home. True she does her best, coming frequently, and spending long days in Eleanor's society. But though Mrs. Roche entertains her charmingly, she refuses to discuss Philip, and flees from good advice with the clever tact that can conceal rudeness and yet repel in a breath.

Philip turns away and wipes his brow.

"I don't know why," says Philip one day, in confidence to Erminie, "but though I do all in my power to win back my wife's love, it seems I have lost it for ever."

Erminie knows the reason, and so does he, only he dares not own it.

"She has tried me a good deal at times," he continues, "yet I love her just as madly, and that is what makes me seem to her fiendishly cruel occasionally, when the spirit of jealousy robs me of reason. I can't bear it, Erminie, to see her restless and dissatisfied in my presence, to feel her shudder from my kiss. An insurmountable barrier is rising between us. Can you guess what it is?"

"Yes."

Erminie's answer startles Philip.

"Then you, too, have noticed—all the world sees it? That man who is trying to steal my wife from me is the curse, the foul fiend, the shadow, the shame. I met him in the City only yesterday. He tried to bow, but I looked him in the face and cut him dead. He paled and shrank away."

"Then, perhaps," suggests Erminie hopefully, "Eleanor has broken with him?"

"Not so long as she is in Giddy Mounteagle's clutches. For a while I let my business alone, I stayed at home day after day to guard and watch her. She divined

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the reason, and chafed against her cage, like a bird bereft of song, whose wings are cut. Things went badly for me on the Stock Exchange; I found I was losing hundreds, thousands, through my absence. Finally I returned, and Eleanor's face grew brighter—*she had seen him again!*"

"How do you know?"

"Don't ask me."

Philip turns away and wipes his brow. Erminie's true heart bleeds for him as she thinks of the perfect sympathy and confidence reigning between herself and Nelson.

"Your cloud may lift in time," she says, somewhat lamely seeking to console him.

"It may deepen," he answers lugubriously.

"Supposing you were able to persuade Eleanor to go home for a visit; it would be pleasant at Copthorne now the spring has come. Her parents are good, honest people, the country life a healthy one. It might strengthen her in body and mind, awaking memories of youth and innocence, your courtship, her marriage! There is no tonic for a diseased mind like fresh air and green fields. She said she longed to see the dear old farm again only yesterday. It would put her beyond the reach of Giddy Mounteagle, and you might run up and down several times in the week."

"I will suggest it," says Philip.

The idea delights Mrs. Roche beyond measure when later on her husband mentions it. She has frequently met Carol Quinton of late, and the ardour of his passion, and her own over-powering love, have frightened her at last.

The thought of escaping to the country to seek forgetfulness and avoid temptation appeals to her.

She puts her arms softly and half timidly round Philip's neck, resting her cheek against his, as she has not done for weeks.

He snatches her to his heart with a cry, smothering her face in kisses. "Eleanor, can't we be better friends?" he whispers.

The tears course down her cheeks, the guilty love she is trying to crush rises before her—jeering, taunting.

"I will try, Philip," she falters. "Only let me go home for a while, and see the old scenes, the familiar faces."

He still holds her to him, his pulses thrilling at her softened tone, as he answers: "Yes."

"I am really going back to the farm, Giddy," she says the following day, "to vegetate, and grow young again among the primroses and violets. The lawn will be yellow with crocus flowers, and I can almost smell the hyacinths. I promised them faithfully I would return, when the birds began to sing!"

"Can't we be better friends?"

"You must give me your address," says Giddy. "I should like to write."

Eleanor looks at her shrewdly.

She has never quite forgotten the "Lady MacDonald" or "the party" episode. It is the recollection of this that makes her state, with a certain pride, the pleasure she feels in visiting her people.

"I will give it you on one condition," she replies.

"And that?"

"Promise me faithfully on no account to pass it on to Carol Quinton."

"Why not?"

"Because I have gone too far, Giddy. I want to get away from his influence. You know he dogs my footsteps, tracks, and haunts me. I dare not trust myself. I am going away for a course of discipline, simple living, and country pursuits. I know if you promise, I can trust you."

She holds out a paper on which her address is written, but keeps her palm over the letter till Giddy shall make the promise.

"I swear," says Mrs. Mounteagle.

(To be continued.)

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A BITTER REVENGE.

Peradventure I was wrong. Wiser men than I have gone astray over a subject far less intricate than a woman. Maybe it was a pang of jealousy that shot through my already wavering heart and turned the admiration I had hitherto held for her into curiosity not unmixed with hatred. And that jealousy was not without good and sufficient basis.

From the time that she joined our company Ira Cleon was the idol of both men and women. All the men worshipped her, and all the women admired her.

I say all the men, but it was not so. There was one who prided himself on his ability to read the woman off on sight; who discovered, or imagined he discovered, traits in her character that were hidden from the rude gaze of the world; who more than once, by the careful wielding of the power he possessed, succeeded in bringing forcibly before the unhappy woman her inmost thoughts and wishes, laying them bare in the air which surrounded her. I was that person.

Ira Cleon appeared amongst us when *The Feud* was about to be produced for the first time at Norman's Theatre. She came as leading lady. Our manager had picked her up in America, but she was not an American. She spoke several languages, but no one knew her history.

She was very beautiful, and I cannot do justice to a description of her. Yet with my blunt pen and dull wit I will make the attempt.

Her eyes were large, blue, and overhung with long, silky lashes; her soft cheeks were tinged with the rosiest red; the full, rich lips, the pearly teeth, the short curly hair, the white dimpled arms, the form of suppleness and grace—combine the whole with a strange union of masculine force and womanly sweetness, and you may be able to catch a glimpse of our lady through the misty and all too clumsy veil of prosaicness that I in my incapacity have drawn around her beauty.

Thus, in such a form she is as near perfection as mortal woman could hope to be.

But listen to her talking, watch her stride, note the vile cigarette between those dainty lips, and hear in amazement the coarse jests that emanate from the small clouds of smoke that rise around her curly head.

Then you will, perhaps, get an insight into the character of this fair lady.

She rises from the box on which she has been sitting—carelessly, legs crossed—and strides over to the manager anxiously scanning a roll of manuscript. She claps him on the back with a loud "Ha! Ha!" that makes him start. It amuses her, but the reprimand that is on his lips is dispelled in a moment, for he knows full well she can give him back all that he is worth.

Again, she passes on to an actor, a pale-faced, black haired youth, madly in love with her, whose obsequious courtesies she repudiates with scorn. Sometimes, however, she smilingly encourages him, raising his hopes to ecstatic bliss, then, out of mere wantonness and pleasure at seeing him suffer, dashes him down to grovel at her feet, by an expression of displeasure, or the shadow of a frown.

She is in a playful mood to-night, and the sickly boy rejoices at her winning smiles, hoping against hope they are meant for him, and him alone.

"Ah, poor Turmole!" she cried nonchalantly, flinging aside the stump of her cigarette, and preparing a fresh weed. "You seem in good spirits to-night. Not quite so confoundedly groggy." And she laughs gaily as the gas jet, at which she obtains a light, radiates on the cruel, lovely face.

"'Tis but natural," comes the reply, with a dramatic flourish of the thin, white hand, "that I should feel the glamour of your presence, even as the world looks bright and cheerful beneath the warm and fruitful rays of King Sol."

"Then it's comforting to know I have a different effect upon you to what the moon has," she replies with a slight dash of sarcasm, moving towards her next victim.

"Oh, pray, you misunderstand me," gasped the love-sick one, stretching out his hands supplicatingly after her in vain. He sinks back dejected, miserable, realising in its intensity the bitter fact that this woman he adores despises him.

And so she passes from one to another, treating them in much the same way, knowing all the time what pain and anguish she is causing the love-sick fools, and revelling in her heartlessness.

She loved her profession; her whole heart was on the boards. She may have been good at the bottom; sometimes I almost fancy she was, and that I was too harsh in criticising her little excesses. More than once she told me I had no right to do so as a fellow actor.

"Let Society be my judge," were her words; and Society went mad over her, though beyond its kindly criticisms she cared nothing for Society.

She always assumed male *rôles* and few were able to

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bring out so fully and powerfully the features that characterise the stage hero.

There came a time, some months after she appeared amongst us, when the piece, which had met with a most successful run, was to be supplanted by another of an equally thrilling nature, the cast of which meant the addition of another member to the company.

This person took the form of a man named Ralph Masser, a tall, splendidly built fellow, with a forcible and determined cast of countenance.

I shall never forget the night of the first rehearsal. How we all watched every movement of that lithe and muscular body, listened to the sound of that rich, deep voice, and applauded with genuine admiration as he stepped to the back of the stage at the conclusion.

I was near Ira as he finished, and she just clasped her hands in rapture, while a soft "bravo!" escaped her lips. Somehow or other I could not keep my eyes off her face, and I noticed that as she caught sight of him when he turned towards us a deathly pallor overspread the features, while a gasp of amazement and terror issued from the white lips. It was soon over. But I am an observant man, and my suspicions were aroused. She must have known him before.

On one occasion I told her so. But she strenuously denied it. Then I became so positive that she admitted the truth of my assertion.

It so happened that Ira and the newcomer shared the honours of the celebrated duel scene in the new play. And she never acted so well as when with him, treating him with marked familiarity.

I watched them narrowly. No one else did; no one else had any reason for doing so. I had. True, every male actor in our company was madly jealous, but, after a time, resigned himself to fate, and gave up all hope of ever winning that love so palpably offered to another.

If tender actions may be taken as a sign of tender feelings in these matters, little doubt could be entertained as to whether or not the two loved.

He was ever by her side, whispering soft words to her willing ears, driving her to and from the theatre, championing her cause in her absence. She, too, laughed less often when he was near, never gave way to coarse jokes, accepted the little favours from him that she had refused of others, and flushed slightly at his approach. These signs all came under my notice, and I had many opportunities of observing them.

Still, there seemed to me to be an occult something existing between them. They had reached a point in their love beyond which it appeared impossible to extend.

Once, at a morning rehearsal, I chanced to stumble unobserved into the green-room. There they sat, together, on a lounge, her head resting on his shoulder. She was speaking, and as I turned to go, the words:

"My love, my only love!" fell upon my startled ears.

Then, as days went by, her smile came less often, and the eyes became encircled with dark rings, her step was less sprightly than of old, while sometimes she became dazed and bewildered, losing all control of her movements and the thread of her discourse.

The manager saw and noted all these developments for the worse in her disposition, and said that she studied too hard. No one could in common fairness gainsay that. She had worked hard ever since we had known her, and certainly a change would do her good.

Rather than lose permanently so valuable a member of his company, he decided to finish up the run and send her off to America for a time with Masser. To this both agreed.

On the last night I was standing in the wings, awaiting my cue, when I heard them approaching. She was staggering slightly, with pale face and quivering body. He was supporting her. Some strange incident had taken place between them, of that I felt certain. When they got quite close to me she was better, though very white.

Ira went on first, and I had never seen her look more beautiful. The house fairly shook with rolls of applause, which burst out afresh as he entered from the opposite side.

With a small peaked cap set jauntily on the mass of golden curls, a light blue cloak hanging caressingly over her shoulders, and her shapely limbs encased in a pair of white breeches and top boots, our leading lady represented to perfection a champion of the age of chivalry.

By her side hung a small sword—a mere plaything—bright, glistening, and harmless. This she drew at the conclusion of a blusteringly delivered speech, and swung round her head, crying to the ruffian who stood before her:

"Defend yourself!"

With a well-practised, swift movement, his rapier leapt from its sheath, and steel clashed with steel.

How the people applauded! They were splendidly matched, these two, his six feet scarcely lifting him above her plume-covered cap.

At last, as in all such battles, the hero, by a dextrous movement, sent his opponent's sword springing across the greensward.

"Enough!" she cried, holding her weapon aloft, then flinging it away with a gesture of contempt.

She approached him, and, as a hundred times before she had done, would have clasped his hand. But at that point she hesitated. A thrill seemed to pass over the delicate frame. The whole theatre was hushed in silence. A white hand was ungloved and thrust beneath the light blue cloak. Another second, and Masser lay unconscious on the stage, while a thin, blue smoke curled unnoticed up and up till it vanished in air.

* * * * *

Masser was not mortally wounded; he recovered from the effects of his wound, and left the country before Ira came back to health and strength.

It was all explained a few months afterwards.

She was a Corsican, and had sworn to avenge her brother's death. Such was the issue in the battle between love and duty.

Masser had known her motive all the time; had known that she would attempt his life, sooner or later. And the strangest part of the whole thing was his connivance at it.

F. J. L.

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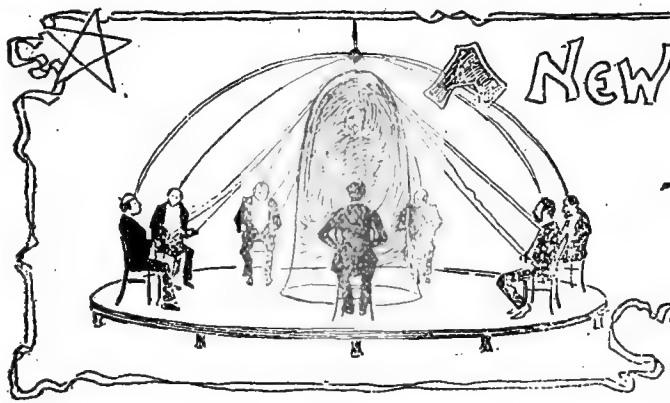

New Theosophy:

The Recent Startling Manifestations of the Pentagram Club:

I have frequently had occasion to visit a certain new and commodious building in Market Street, many of the chambers of which are yet untenanted, and as my business took me to a somewhat remote quarter of the building, I had sometimes, when the lift was not running, to pass along not a few of the lengthy corridors on my way to my destination. There was one door which always piqued my curiosity as I passed it. Instead of having the name and business of the tenant emblazoned on the panelling as is usually the custom, this particular door had upon it nothing but a plain, silver star.

I do not know why it should have been so, but my curiosity was nettled. What did it matter to me, I asked myself, who composed any of the many clubs, social, political, or otherwise, with which the city abounds? Perhaps the star upon the door had something to do with it, for it had not escaped my attention

Face to face with a well-known member of the Union Club.

that this star was of the five-pointed variety; it was, in short, neither more nor less than the mystic pentagram, which has, from the earliest times, been associated with all that is esoteric and occult. Be this as it may, I mentally resolved to fathom the mystery, if mystery there was, for there was nothing to indicate anything of the kind as yet, and accordingly I went systematically about it.

I had, as I have said, never seen anyone going in or out of the apartments in question. But my business in the building had always called for my presence in the daytime, or early evening—never at night. The logical inference to be drawn from this was, that I should be more likely to get the desired information by being in the neighbourhood of the apartments in question at night.

I accordingly put this idea into practice, and for several nights—three, as a matter of fact—I arrived at the main entrance of the building about eight o'clock, ascended to the fourth floor, and sauntered leisurely about the deserted corridor, always, however, keeping in mind the object I had in view.

On the third night I got tired of my unfruitful vigil. I looked at my watch—it was a quarter past eleven—and then walked briskly down the corridor towards the main staircase. I had hardly reached it when I heard footsteps on the stairs, and, as I reached them, found myself face to face with a well-known member of the Union Club, in evening dress and overcoat, smoking a cigar. The light from the street was strong enough for me to recognise objects which would have been too obscure for recognition had not my eyes been rendered supersensitive by their long watch in the darkness.

As it was, the gentleman in question did not recognise me, or if he did, made no sign of recognition, though our acquaintanceship was one of no recent date. I felt, however, that explanations were not in order at the moment, and though I could not help connecting his presence with the club-rooms that had grown so mysterious in my eyes, I recollected the old adage, *noblesse oblige* and with a feeling somewhat more akin to shame than I had yet experienced in my self-instituted investigations, passed hurriedly on and descended the stairs.

Before I had reached the second storey I met another clubman—a well-known broker and member of the Ocean Club—dressed in evening costume, like the other, swinging his stick jauntily, and humming an operatic air as he tripped lightly up. He, too, took no notice of my presence, if indeed he saw me.

By this time I had come to the conclusion: First, that the apartments I had been regarding with so much mystery and suspicion were certainly the meeting-rooms of a club; secondly, that this club had been organised by a select coterie of well-to-do and reputable gentlemen

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for purposes of their own enjoyment; and, thirdly, that I had been wasting my time in a wild-goose chase towards the mystic and the occult, and had found instead a resort of a few gentlemen of leisure and fashion, who had no doubt selected these quarters as a quiet retreat from the conventionality and boredom with which they were afflicted at the more open and populous clubs.

In less than a minute I had reached the entrance, and was standing there looking and waiting for my particular 'bus, when another gentleman came along, and turned into the doorway. He, too, was well-known to me as one of the deepest thinkers and most laborious workers in his own special department of science that this portion of the world, or, for that matter, the world generally, boasts. Should I connect him, too, with an association arranged for mere purposes of relaxation and pleasure, such as I could well imagine the two gentlemen who had preceded him would have been in their element in? But then—*dulce est desipere in loco*—and, perhaps, who knows, Professor P—— was no exception to the time-honoured rule.

But this was not yet the termination of my ponderings. During the next four or five minutes in which I waited for one of those late 'buses, which give the amplest possible latitude to the laggard, three more gentlemen brushed past me, each by himself; one, a lawyer of unquestioned abilities, but somewhat questionable reputation; another, a divine whose reputation is as unquestioned as his attainments are varied and profound; and a third, who was unknown to me, but whose cultured face, thoughtful expression, and dignified bearing, at once convinced me that he was no common man, whatever the department of life he had selected or filled.

"And now I will tell you something about our aims and objects."

Scarcely ten seconds after the last arrival had passed in, who, of course, I could not help associating with those who had preceded him, as the hour precluded the idea of anyone having any special business of his own in the almost untenanted and deserted building, and the closeness of the arrivals arguing evident design, I caught sight of my friend, Dr. W——, who also turned in at the entrance. After we had shaken hands cordially, I made the remark:

"Doctor, do you belong to that club upstairs?"

"What club?" he asked, taken aback, as I could see, by the directness of the question.

"Why, that club containing such men as——" here I mentioned the names of the gentlemen who had passed by me on my way down the stairs and while I was standing at the door.

"Ah! then you know something about our club?" returned the Doctor musingly; "I should hardly have thought it possible, we are so recently organised, and—well, yes—our proceedings are kept so strictly private."

"On the contrary, I know nothing about it," I replied: "I merely conjectured from some circumstances that have come under my notice, and from the half-a-dozen gentlemen who have just gone upstairs, that there was a club in those rooms with the star on the door, and I thought I would ask you about it. Pardon me if I am too inquisitive. It is a matter of principle with me, as you know, to get as much information as I can about everything that is going on."

"Well," said the Doctor thoughtfully, "come to my office to-morrow, and I think I can tell you something that will make you open your eyes. And now you must excuse me, as I am already late," and he hastened upstairs after the others.

On my way home I kept wondering what sort of a club that could be which contained such seemingly heterogeneous elements as those I have described. What could such men as I had seen, supposing them to be fair samples of the general composition of the society, have in common? It was anomalous to say the least, and the following afternoon found me at Dr. W.'s office, at an hour when I knew he was at leisure, eager for an explanation.

"Yes," assented the Doctor, after we were seated, and I had referred to the anomaly which struck me as curious, "it does seem somewhat strange that men so different in tastes and aspirations should come together for any purpose whatever. And now I will tell you something about our aims and objects. Mind," he went on, somewhat more impressively than was his usual custom when speaking to me, "you may consider yourself specially favoured by the disclosures I am going to make, as we had not quite made up our minds that the time had come to make the matter public—for public, of course, it will now be made."

"Not necessarily," I remarked; "that is a matter that must be left entirely to yourself."

"Well, we eventually decided that it would be best to publish to the world a statement of fact, suppressing, however, for the present, all names. You know what the public is. It is always ready to set down anyone who sees or acts beyond its comprehension, or above its plane, as a fool or lunatic. We cannot change, and do not care to face, for the present, its adverse criticism."

I cordially agreed, and the Doctor went on:

"Our society, or club—we call it 'The Pentagram

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Club,' perhaps you noticed the symbol on the door—originated about a month ago, and in a somewhat peculiar manner. Somewhat before that time a gentleman arrived from Vienna, whose name, famous as it is in the scientific world—you know it well, and, for all I know, may know himself—at once made him the recipient of marked attention from our leading people. He was, of course, introduced at all of our principal clubs, and speedily became the centre of a coterie of such of their members as pretended to anything in the shape of scientific tastes.

"It soon transpired that Professor C——, while the department of science in which he has attained pre-eminent distinction is of an eminently practical nature, was, nevertheless, a deep and enthusiastic student of that esoteric branch of science which has been termed theosophy. Many of our club men became interested in the subject through the masterly and graphic way in which the Professor treated it, and many were the discussions and conversations held by the little knot of interested listeners in private rooms, representing almost every walk in life, I myself being no infrequent attendant.

"One afternoon, about a month ago—the sixteenth or seventeenth of May, I think it was—one of these little knots was gathered round Professor C——'s chair in one of the rooms of the Union Club, two of them—Professor P—— and the Rev. Mr. M——, whom you saw yesterday night ascending the stairs leading to our club-rooms—attracted by an earnest desire for information upon the subject-matter discussed; to others—Judge S—— and myself—attracted, I think, rather by the intellectual gratification afforded by listening to a flow of eloquent language and polished diction, no matter what the topic may be; and two others—the broker and the club man whom you say you met first upon the stairs—having strolled in and joined the group, perhaps to kill time, perhaps out of mere curiosity, for they themselves would be the last to lay claim to any special intellectual or scientific aspirations.

"Professor C—— had been expatiating upon the differences between ancient and modern theosophy, a subject on which, I assure you, I am yet woefully ignorant, and for which, to tell the truth, I have not much predilection, when he suddenly broke off from the thread of his discourse, which had really been addressed to the representative of science and theology, in the persons of Professor P—— and the Rev. Mr. M——, the other four of us having drifted in, and become members of the group from motives I have already suggested, and addressed us all collectively:

"'Gentlemen,' he said, as near as I can recall his language, the manner of which was particularly grave and impressive, 'I am about to make what may seem a peculiar, not to say startling, proposition. I am led to believe from some facts I have noted, and experiments I have made within the last day or two, that I am on the eve of making the most important discovery in regard to the true relations existing between what we are pleased to call, in default of a better term, the spiritual and the material world, a discovery which, if it results, as I doubt not it will, in success, will set speculation at rest for ever regarding these relations, and supply the key that will unlock all the secrets of the unknown. Gentlemen, will you assist me in making a great, a grand experiment, and share with me the honour of a discovery which will make your names illustrious and honoured for all time?'

"None of us could fail to be impressed by the earnestness, sincerity, and dignity of Professor C——'s language, but neither did any of us, as I could see, realise what was required of us, a point which the Professor was not slow to appreciate, and he proceeded:

"'What I have to propose, practically, gentlemen, is this: We, now sitting here, number seven persons in all; we symbolise the mystic number seven. Nay, we do more. I think I am not mistaken in saying—for I have had the pleasure of being introduced to you all—that we symbolise in our several persons, the seven polite professions, and the seven different sorts and conditions of men, intellectually, socially, and—pardon me for speaking the truth—morally. On either hand of me'—here the Professor bowed courteously to Professor P——, and the Rev. Mr. M——, 'sit science and religion. In the front of me'—with a gracious inclination to Judge S—— and myself—'sit law and medicine. I also notice, with pleasure'—here the Professor smiled pleasantly in the direction of Mr. B——, the broker, and Mr. G——, the club man—'that my friends, law and medicine, are ably supported by my other friends, business and leisure.

"'Myself I shall modestly designate labour, as upon me will devolve the work of giving the theoretical principle of my experiment a practical shape, and I can assure you it will entail no little labour to do so. I shall, possibly, never be fortunate enough to chance upon the same combination again. I think I can say, with perfect truth, that we combine within ourselves all the elements and conditions necessary for success. The next question is, will you accord me your assistance? Briefly, what I propose is this: First, that we constitute ourselves into a Theosophical Society—call it a club if you will. Secondly, that we secure an apartment which will insure us privacy. Thirdly, that you spare me an hour or two of your time once a week. I will engage on my part, not to overtax your forbearance, and I think, nay, I feel assured that you will be richly repaid for your time and trouble. I shall be pleased to hear how my proposal strikes each one of you individually.'

"Again there was an awkward pause, and for a moment or two nobody spoke. Mr. B——, the broker, was the first to break the silence. Bowing to Professor C——, he said:

"'The proposition, gentlemen, strikes me as being an eminently fair one, and we should certainly lack in politeness to our guest if we failed to accede to it. As for the end aimed at, I am incompetent to speak. I do not know much about science in any of its branches, particularly the branch the Professor has been discussing. I shall, however, be happy to do my part, so far as in me lies, in the matter of attendance, providing that does not much exceed, as the Professor intimated, an hour or two once a week, and so far as money is concerned, I shall guarantee that the Professor's experiments shall not suffer for lack of that.'

"This speech, brief and to the point, was greeted with applause.

"Mr. G——, of the Union Club, next signified his adherence to the plan, reiterating in a degree the sentiments of Mr. B——. Judge S—— was the next to fall into line. Professor P—— and myself stated frankly that we were not deterred by any scruples but that of expense. We said we did not care to go blindly into any scheme without having some idea of what cost it would entail, while the Rev. Mr. M—— demurred to becoming a member of a theosophical society on the ground that it was unbefitting a minister of the gospel.

"'Being a man, however, of liberal ideas, he was

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eventually won over by the arguments of Professor C——, while as regards the prudential objections of Professor P—— and myself, it was shown that the necessary expense of renting and furnishing a club-room suitable for the purpose was insignificant, while with regard to whatever else was necessary in the way of apparatus, etc., Professor C—— said that as he alone knew what was necessary, he alone must be responsible for providing it. He also stated that four weekly meetings extending over one month would be sufficient to give his theory a fair test.

"Messrs. B—— and G—— were then unanimously elected a committee of ways and means, and these gentlemen are responsible for the elegant club-rooms, which our society enjoys, and to which, by the way, I am empowered to extend you an invitation by Professor C—— and the other members, for next Thursday evening at eleven o'clock, when you can judge for yourself of the aim and scope of our undertaking."

"And have the results you have achieved," I asked, after expressing my thanks and hearty acceptance of the invitation, "answered your expectations?"

"Yes and no," returned Dr. W—— sententiously; "in the first place, the society has as yet held only three formal meetings, which have been devoted to listening to very delightful addresses from Professor C—— upon such topics as 'Intercourse with the Superior Intelligences,' 'The Higher Life,' and so on; these discourses being followed by an exercise, or species of training, in what the Professor calls 'the art of concentration.' Most of them were inclined to smile, and some of us did laugh heartily upon the first occasion, at the peculiar apparatus which forms a part of this exercise, but the simple and sincere earnestness of the Professor, his logical explanation of the meaning of what we were called upon to do, and his immovable confidence in the efficacy of his methods to bring about what he aims at, namely, a real and tangible communication with the 'higher intelligences,' as he terms them, were sufficient to repress any disposition on the part of any of our number towards unbecoming levity.

"How it will all end, or anything will come of our meetings and exercises in the way the Professor hopes, I, for my part, more than doubt. To tell the truth, I am no believer in these new-fangled metaphysical theories at all, and were it not that we are in honour bound to give our guest all the assistance and countenance we can, for at least one month, most of us, I think, would have politely withdrawn from the society.

"At the next meeting, however, we are led to expect great developments. A certain appliance, we are told, which had to be specially constructed for the purpose, and which has been, since the formation of the society in process of manufacture, will be completed and put in place upon the occasion. You will then be able to see and judge for yourself of the whole business. Till then, good-bye. I see I have an appointment with a patient."

During the next week I had occasion, as usual, to pass frequently by the rooms of the Pentagram Club. In the early part of the week I noticed an unusual bustle in the corridor where these rooms were. Large packing-cases were lying about, one of which, indeed, was so large that a door had to be taken off its hinges, and the jambs and part of the partition wall removed, before it could be introduced into the apartments. The glimpse of the interior which I gained through this opening convinced me that theosophy need not necessarily be allied to asceticism, at any rate, when members of the sect happen to be capitalists or brokers.

Several minutes before eleven, on the following Thursday night, found me before the door bearing the mystic star, as I was determined that nothing should suffer through my tardiness. It had not occurred to me to make my presence known by knocking, as I heard no signs of life inside, and was not prepared for the remark of my friend, Dr.——, who was the first to arrive.

Before the door bearing the mystic star.

"Why didn't you knock?" he asked. "Professor C—— is inside, and you are expected. But come in, and I will introduce you."

We passed together into a very elegantly and tastefully furnished apartment, at a table in which a gentleman was reading. Professor C——, to whom I was then, for the first time, introduced, though I had known him for many years by reputation as one of the most, if not the most, distinguished *savant* in his particular sphere in the world, welcomed me cordially and said that he hoped, nay, that he felt confident, I would witness that night some of the sublimest phenomena it was possible to conceive. Our conversation was, however, interrupted at the outset by the arrival in quick succession of other members of the club, and after the usual few minutes allowed for the interchange of greetings had passed, the meeting was informally called to order by Professor C—— in the following terms:

"Gentlemen and fellow members, it gives me great gratification to inform you that the apparatus for which we have been waiting has been constructed according to order, and that it is complete in every particular. I have been for two days past superintending its disposition in our exercise-room, and if you are all of you ready we will now proceed to test it."

The Professor then led the way to the folding-doors communicating with the next apartment, and, pushing them aside, we passed through. Here a scene met my eyes which necessitates a somewhat close description.

This room was perfectly bare of decoration of any kind save a gas-chandelier suspended from the ceiling, all the burners of which were lighted. The uncarpeted floor exposed the hard wood boards of which it was made. In the centre of the floor stood a circular platform of some polished black wood, I think ebony, supported at a height of some ten or twelve inches from the floor by a series of stout glass pillows or pedestals, seven in number.

The circular platform, which measured, I should say, some sixteen or eighteen feet in diameter, was scored by a number of interlacing lines, stretching from one point of the periphery to another, along which some fine yellow powder, that looked like resin, had been strewn to the width of perhaps an inch. These interlacing lines formed a heptagonal figure drawn upon the principle of the pentagram, and at each of the seven

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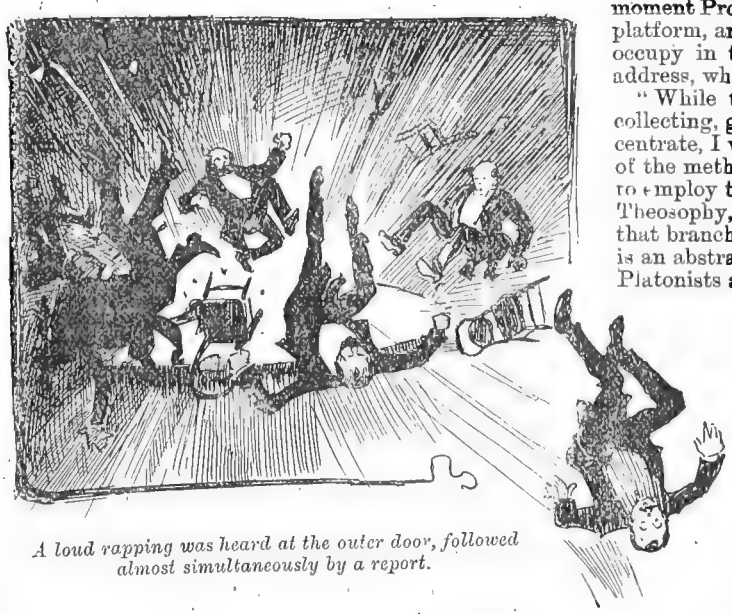
angles of this figure, and close to the edge of the platform, stood an ordinary wooden chair.

In the centre of this heptagonal figure stood an object which arrested my attention. The construction of a heptagonal figure, on the lines of the pentagram, involves a central space left blank within the intersecting lines of the figure. Within this blank space lay a flat, polished disc of glass, some four feet in diameter, and several inches in thickness, and upon this disc rested a huge glass bell, shaped like the receiver of an air pump, some seven feet in height by, perhaps, three feet and a half in width. What struck me most, with regard to the size and general proportions of this bell, was that a full-grown man of large stature could have stood and moved comfortably within it.

From the apex of this bell issued a series of cords, which looked like insulated wires, the resemblance being



A loud rapping was heard at the outer door, followed almost simultaneously by a report.

further heightened by the fact that each of them ended in a metal handle, such as is used on galvanic batteries, two of which lay upon each chair. To complete the strange and mysterious accessories of the apartment, suspended from the ceiling by a line passed through a block, so that it could be raised or lowered at pleasure was a nondescript appliance which I shall endeavour to describe. From a brass ball, some inches in diameter, radiated seven curved brass rods, each of which formed the arc of a quadrant, and ended in an oval band of metal, the whole structure being so arranged that each of the terminal oval bands of metal hung suspended directly over one of the seven chairs.

It was not long before I discovered the use and object of this strange contrivance. My eye took in at a glance what it has taken me several minutes to describe, and as soon as we had all filed into the room, the others stepped on to the circular platform and took their seats, evidently by preconcerted arrangement, with the exception of Professor C——, who released the line holding the suspended system of rods, so that it was lowered till each of the other six had fixed the oval metal band, in which each rod terminated, securely upon his forehead.

He then detached by means of a forked rod the brass ball from the line, so that the whole structure was free. Meanwhile, each of the six had taken in their hands the metallic terminals of the wires that issued from the apex of the glass ball. I had, meanwhile, settled into one of the two chairs remaining vacant, which stood in one of the corners left by the platform near the door, and towards which the Professor had motioned me on entering.

I must confess that the situation, at first sight, impressed me as somewhat ludicrous. The spectacle of six scientific, religious, hard-headed, reputable, and rich—as the case might be—gentlemen of the nineteenth century engaging in such a fantastical mummery as this struck me, as I say, at first as something supremely funny, and I could quite appreciate the sentiments of my friend the Doctor over his first similar experience. This disposition to ridicule disappeared, however, the moment Professor C—— began to talk. Ascending the platform, and standing in front of the chair he was to occupy in the circle, he delivered the following brief address, which I took down verbatim:

"While the fluids necessary to our experiment are collecting, gentlemen, and before it is necessary to concentrate, I will say a few words regarding the rationale of the methods we are now the first among human kind to employ to communicate with the higher intelligences. Theosophy, as generally understood, and more especially that branch of it which has sprung up in modern times, is an abstract science, its votaries living like the Neo-Platonists and early mystics in the realm of ideas.

"But, my friends, the new theosophy, of which I am the humble, but confident exponent and apostle, works by a surer method in its dealings with the beings with whom it desires to communicate. Suppose we admit that the spirit, for instance, after leaving the body, mingles with, and becomes lost in the illimitable Nirvana. The mission of the new theosophy is to draw that spirit thence, to reconstruct it, in fine, to condense it again from the Nirvana, or primitive element into which it has been absorbed into a quasi-material form, which shall be appreciable to one or more of our corporeal senses.

"The means, gentlemen, are before you, in you, and at your command. Your heads, the seats of your several intelligences, are connected together by these metal rods, terminating in yonder metal ball. Wires, again, proceed from your several hands to yonder insulated receiver standing in your midst, where they also meet in a common focus, namely, that other metal knob which you see in the apex of the bell. Thus there is a focus without, towards which you draw from the illimitable ether, and a focus within, towards which you concentrate. You constitute in effect a very powerful battery, though the fluid, or force, which it generates is more subtle and ethereal than that generated by ordinary chemical action.

"The next step, gentlemen," continued Professor C——, as he took his seat in the only vacant chair upon the platform, adjusted the metal band upon his temples, and grasped the handles of the remaining wires, "is to concentrate. Let us agree upon some intelligence—some notable being, let us say, who once lived upon this earth, for though that condition should not be, if my theory is correct, essential in practice, for all intelligences, I hold,

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that exist in the infinite Nirvana should be equally amenable to law, yet it commends itself as more suitable for a first experiment—and then let us exert our wills in silent invocation for its presence. If my theory is correct, the intelligence unanimously invoked will make itself known to us in yonder insulated receiver."

Several names were proposed as widely apart as Plato, Napoleon, Newton, Darwin, Shakespeare, the choice finally settling upon Shakespeare as a compromise, the question as to whether he was or was not the author of the plays not militating, Professor C—— said, against his availability as a subject.

Several badly-frightened gentlemen.

"And now let me caution you," said the Professor gravely, "against permitting your thoughts to wander from the matter in hand. It is not only that concentration is absolutely essential to the accomplishment of our aim, but for all I can tell—this is an untried experiment, as you are aware—any serious defect in this respect may be attended with danger. We are dealing, it must be remembered, with the most potent force in nature, and must be correspondingly cautious. If we preserve equanimity and act harmoniously, I am confident we have nothing to fear. But, above all things, let us keep our attention fixed upon the matter in hand. Now."

It was certainly a curious spectacle, as I sat in my chair in the corner and watched and waited. Seven gentlemen, some in evening dress, representing widely different circles in society, sitting on an insulated circular platform, their chairs ranged with mathematical precision in a heptagon, in their centre a vast glass bell, from which radiated a system of telegraphic wires, while from their heads rose a structure of metal rods, which towered above them in the centre, looking, with its curved sides and spherical apex, for all the world like a gigantic crown. The light from the chandelier threw the whole scene into vivid relief, and seemed perfectly in keeping with this exhibition of nineteenth century necromancy, if such it could be called, conducted on scientific principles and with one of the ablest *savants* in the world for its prophet and high priest.

I looked at my watch—it was not yet half-past eleven The minutes passed on as I watched the strangely-assorted figures on the platform, sitting silent and immobile at their fantastic employment. But my reverie was cut abruptly short. I became aware that something was going on in the glass bell. Yes, there could be no doubt about it, the bell seemed to be filled with a greyish mist slowly moving and convoluting upon itself, while upon the glass sides appeared those signs of of condensation one sees upon window panes on a cold day.

I could see by the excitement on the faces of those upon the platform that they were fully aware of the phenomenon also.

In a minute more, the drops upon the sides of the bell cleared away and an indistinct and shadowy form began to take shape.

As the seconds passed, it assumed greater distinctness and regularity. A human head, with broad, expansive brow, seemed to grow from a body of medium height and symmetrical structure. I caught a glimpse—it was only a glimpse, so riveted was my gaze by the spectacle in the glass bell—of the smile of triumph which irradiated the countenance of Professor S——; of the mingled awe and perplexity depicted upon the visage of the Reverend Mr. M——; of the look of keen analysis which overspread the face of Dr. W——; of some trembling arms and shaking limbs of figures sitting with their backs to me; and the next moment a loud rapping was heard at the outer door, followed almost simultaneously by a report like that of a small cannon, accompanied with a lightning flash, after which there was complete darkness. I felt a large body hurled against me, and by the time I had scrambled to my feet from where I had fallen, one of the burners of the chandelier, which had been extinguished by the explosion, again burst into light, and I saw Professor C—— standing in the centre of the platform in the act of lighting the others.

The glass bell was nowhere to be seen, but in its place a little heap of pulverised glass lay piled upon the glass disc which supported it. Several badly frightened gentlemen had now picked themselves up from various quarters of the room where they had fallen, looking ruefully ludicrous.

No one had been hurt, fortunately. Explanations followed.

It turned out that Dr. W——'s wife had been taken suddenly ill, and she, knowing where he was, had sent the servant after him.

Professor C—— maintains that the explosion occurred through the spirit of Shakespeare having been suddenly left without the moral support necessary for its corporeal maintenance, owing to the distraction of the minds of the members of the circle from their work of concentration, by the sudden knocking at the door, and had accordingly returned incontinently to the bosom of Nirvana and its place in the universal ether. He is triumphant, however, over the undoubted success of his experiment, and is backed up by all the other members of the club, in proof whereof a new bell has been ordered.

The most striking circumstances about the explosion, in my eyes, lay in the fact that no one was hurt, and that the glass bell crumbled into dust—not fragments—like a Prince Rupert's drop, and that not one particle of that dust fell outside of the glass disc that stood in the centre of the heptagon.

Robert Duncan Milne.

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TWICE TEN YEARS.

I remember it as well as if it were yesterday. The carriage stood at the door that was to take me back to school for the spring term. My mother gave me innumerable instructions, smoothed my collar, and adjusted my cap on my head properly, then gave me a kiss and stood looking wistfully at me as I went down the walk and got into the carriage.

A month or two later—it was in June, I think—after a hard struggle one afternoon with some figures, all about a ship and a cargo and the profit and all that, I went out to join the boys. When I reached the playground they were gone, and there was nothing for me to do but amuse myself as best I could. I strolled about the house with my hands in my pockets (which my mother had told me distinctly I must not do), and suddenly remembering her instructions took them out again, then, for want of better amusement, I began to whistle.

Next to the school there was a pretty cottage separated from the school-house by a board fence. The two houses were not one hundred feet apart, and I could look right through under the trees, and there on the tennis-ground stood a girl a trifle younger than myself looking straight at me.

Now, when a boy suddenly finds himself observed by a girl, he feels quite queer. I remember that very well. My hands went right into my pockets, but remembering that was not the correct thing to do in the presence of a girl, I took them directly out again. Then I concluded that it would be a good way to show how little I was embarrassed by turning twice around upon my heel, a movement on which I greatly prided myself. After that I don't remember now—it was so long ago—what new capers I cut. But one thing is very certain. I was soon hunting for something I pretended to have lost in the grass beside the fence.

"If it's your knife you've lost," I heard a little voice say, "it isn't there. I picked up a knife there a week ago, but it was all rusty and no good."

"Oh, never mind," I said, looking up into two eyes peeping out from a sun-bonnet, "it wasn't much of a knife, and I've got another."

"Are you one of the boys at the school?"

"Yes."

"What form are you in?"

"The Fourth."

"Do you study geography?"

"Yes."

"What's the capital of Austria?"

I scratched my head.

"I don't remember that," I admitted reluctantly. "I'm first rate on capitals, but I can't recollect that one."

"Why didn't you go off with the boys?"

"I was behind with my sums. I expect they've gone to the river. I like the woods pretty well, they're full of squirrels."

"And lizards," she added. "I'm not afraid of lizards. I suppose you're afraid to go there."

"No, I'm not."

"If you want to go there now, and are afraid, I don't mind going with you, just to keep off the lizards and things."

She looked wistfully out at the wood. I can see her now leaning on her bat, deliberating—if such a process can be called deliberation where the conclusion is predetermined—the straight, lithe figure poised between the bat and one foot, one little leg crossed on the other—peering out at the forest. Suddenly, without any warning, she dropped the bat and started for the wood.

We were not long in crossing the field, and were walking in the dense shade when she stopped, and looking at me with her expressive eyes said:

"How still it is in here! It seems to me I can almost hear it be still."

"Yes, it is pretty solemn," I replied. "Let's go on; the river winds about down there, and we can see the water go over the dam."

I heard a distant voice calling "Julia." It was very faint; she did not hear it; I stood a moment hesitating.

"Come, let's go," I said, starting forward.

"Julia," I heard again, more faintly than before.

I hurried her on, fearing she would hear the voice and turn back.

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Presently we emerged from the wood and stood by the river. I was familiar with the ground, and led my little friend directly to the dam.

"Most of the boys are afraid to walk out on that dam," I said.

"I'd be afraid."

"But you're only a girl: a boy oughtn't to be afraid." With that I started boldly out, occasionally standing on one foot, and performing sundry antics to show what a brave boy I was. Then I came part-way back and called to her to come.

"Oh, no," she said; "I'm afraid."

"Afraid! You little goose! With me to hold on to?"

Betwixt her fear and a disposition pliable to a boy older and stronger than herself, it was not long before I was leading her out on the dam.

"Don't you see it's nothing?" I said.

She shrank back as I led her along. I determined that she should go to a point where the water poured over a portion of the dam lower than the rest. I turned my back to step up on the post. It was but a moment. I heard a cry, and saw Julia in the flood. The expression that was in her eyes is to this day stamped clearly on my memory—an expression of mingled reproach and forgiveness.

I could scarcely swim a dozen strokes, but not a second had elapsed before I was in the water.

I swam and struggled and buffeted to reach her; all in vain. An eddy whirled me in a different direction. My strength was soon exhausted. I was borne down the river, sinking and rising, till I came to a place where I caught a glimpse as I rose to the surface of a man running along some planks extending into the river, and raised above the water on posts. My feet became entangled in weeds. I sank. I heard a great roaring in my ears, then oblivion.

When I came to I was lying on my back. I remember the first thing I saw was a light cloud sailing over the clear blue. There was an air of quiet and peace in it that contrasted with my own sensations. Then I saw a man on his knees beside something he was rubbing. I turned my head aside and saw it was a little figure—a girl, Julia. She was cold and stark.

My agony was far greater than when I had plunged after her into the stream. Then I hoped and believed that if she were drowned I would be also. Now I saw her beside me lifeless, and I lived.

Then some men came, and the man who was rubbing Julia said to them: "Take care of the boy; the girl is too far gone." They took me up and carried me away, and laid me for a while on a bed in a strange house. Then I was driven to the school.

The next day my father came and took me home. I was ill after that, too ill to ask about Julia, but when I recovered what a load was taken from my mind to know that by dint of rubbing and rolling and a stimulant she had been brought to and had recovered. I also learnt that the man who cared for us had seen Julia fall and had rescued her. When I saw him running along the planks it was to his boat chained to the end.

That summer my father removed with his family to Devonshire. He was obliged to wait some time for my recovery, but at last I was able to travel, and left without again seeing the little girl whom I had led into danger. I only heard that I had been blamed by everyone.

* * * * *

Ten years passed, during which I was constantly haunted by one idea; that was to go back and find Julia and implore her forgiveness. The years that I must be a boy and dependent seemed interminable. At last I came of age and received a small fortune that had fallen to me, and as soon as the papers in the case were duly signed and sealed I started.

It was just about the same time of the year and the same hour of the afternoon as when I first saw Julia that I walked into the old school grounds. I had fully intended to go in next door and call for her, but my courage failed me. I had heard nothing of her for years. Was she dead? Was she living? Was she in her old home, or far away? These thoughts chased each other through my mind, and I dreaded to know.

I was standing at the school entrance with my hand on the bell when I heard a door in the next house open and then shut. From that moment I could feel that Julia was near me. She came out of the house, a slender, graceful girl of nineteen, and picking up a tennis bat, commenced to knock the balls about. I wanted to make myself known, but dreaded the horror with which she would regard me when she should know who I was.

"I beg your pardon," I said, raising my hat, "can you tell me if the school is still there?" pointing to the house.

"It was moved some years ago," she replied, regarding me with the old honest gaze.

"I was one of the scholars."

"Indeed!" She spoke without any further encouragement for me to go on.

"I see the wood has not been cut away," I added, glancing towards it.

"No, it does not seem to be."

"Were you ever there?"

"Oh, yes, often."

"And is that old dam still across the river?"

"I believe it is."

She looked at me curiously. I went on without waiting for a reply:

"Would you mind showing me the way to it? It is a long while since I was there."

She drew herself up with a slight hauteur. Then thinking that, perhaps, I was unaccustomed to the conventional ways of civilised life, she said pleasantly:

"You have only to walk through the wood straight, at the back of the house, and you will come to it."

"Thank you," I replied, "but I hoped you would show me the way."

She looked puzzled.

"Miss Julia," I said, altering my tone, "I once met you when I was a boy here at school."

"I knew a number of scholars," she said, more interested; "who may you be?"

I dreaded to tell her. "If you will pilot me to the dam," I said, "I will inform you."

She thought a moment, then turned and looked out at the wood. With the quick motion with which she had made the same move as a child she started forward.

We walked side by side to the wood, through it out on the river bank. There was the water and the dam; everything as it had been.

"Did you ever try to walk out there?" I asked.

"Once, when I was a child, I came here with a boy, and we walked to where the water pours over. I met with an accident. I fell in."

"The boy overpersuaded you, I suppose?"

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It was difficult for me to conceal a certain trepidation at the mention of my fault.

"No, I went of my own accord."

"He certainly must have been to blame. He was older and stronger than you."

"On the contrary," she said, with a slight rising irritation, "he jumped after me like the noble little fellow that he was."

I turned away on pretence of examining a boat down the river.

"At any rate he must have begged your forgiveness on his bended knees for permitting you to go into such a danger."

"I never saw him again. He went away."

I fancied—at least, I hoped—I could detect a tinge of sadness in her voice.

"I have often wished," she went on, "that he would come back, as the other scholars sometimes do, as you are now, and let me tell him how much I thank him for his noble effort."

"Julia," I said, suddenly turning and facing her. "This is too much. I am that boy. I led you into the wood. I forced you to go out on the dam with me. I permitted you to fall in."

"And more than atoned for all by risking your life to save me!"

"I knew a number of scholars," she said.

Ah, that look of surprised delight which accompanied her words! It was worth all my past years of suffering, of fancied blame; for in it I read how dearly she held the memory of the boy who had at least shared the danger for which he was responsible.

I do not remember if she grasped my hand or I grasped hers. At any rate, we stood hand in hand looking into each other's faces.

I blessed the Providence that ended my punishment; I blessed the good fortune that had led me to a knowledge of the kindly heart beside me. Of all the moments of my life I still count it far the happiest.

Then we walked back through the woods, over the intervening field, and stood together leaning against the fence between the old school and her home.

* * *

We did not part after that for another ten years. Then she left me to go whence I can never recall her. Yet there is a trysting place in the woods, through which we once passed as children and often afterwards as lovers. There I watch the flecked sunlight and mark the silence, and it seems to me that I can "hear it be still." More than that, I know the pure soul looks at me through the honest eyes.

Kate Rathmore.

In next week's SHORT STORIES will commence a new serial entitled, "The Great Middlewick Bank Robbery."

Have you a Brain?

Assuming you are equipped with one, we ask you: Does it not require pleasant exercise at times, in the shape of mental gymnastics?

Certainly.

Then the finest thing possible is to join **The Brain Gymnasium** in *The Story Teller*.

There is no entrance fee.

The prizes are many, and their aggregate value £25.

Full particulars appear in the issue of *The Story Teller* dated February 29th (1d. every Wednesday), which also contains a complete story by Reginald Baird, the first part of a thrilling narrative (complete in two parts) by Basil Burgoyne, and instalments of serials by Joan Barrett, Gertrude Warden, and Ida Deahl.

IN AN EARLY NUMBER

will commence a powerful story by Frederick Leslie, entitled, "Sindbad's Valley."

BE ON THE LOOK-OUT FOR IT.

PEARSON'S MAGAZINE.

THE March number of *Pearson's Magazine*, published on Friday, February 28th, is an even more marvellous sixpennyworth than the preceding issues.

The series of notes and reproductions of famous pictures under the general heading, "Artists and their Work," continues to improve; while the five full-page plates by Abbey Altson, illustrating a poem by Norman Gale, are full of artistic beauty.

Lady Henry Somerset tells a pathetic story of the self-sacrificing act of a French Sister of Mercy, who saves the lives of her child-charges against a mad dog at the cost of her own, and the narrative is imbellished with illustrations by Mr. G. G. Manton. Mr. Allen Upward continues his "Secrets of the Courts of Europe" with an account of the tragic death of the Sultan Abdul Aziz.

Sir Walter Besant and Mr. W. H. Pollock continue their charming series of "Drawing-room Comedies"; and there are other stories by Mr. Stanley J. Weyman, Frankfort Moore, and Robert Barr. Other articles in this excellent sixpennyworth are: "What it Costs to Run the P. and O. Steamship Company"; "The Grave of a Nation's Honour," by George Griffith—being a full and truthful account of the condition of the Panama Canal to-day; another instalment of W. L. Alden's humorous reflections on topical subjects under the heading: "Wisdom Let Loose"; a vivid description of the Chapel of Bones at Malta, with reproductions of photographs; and "The Great Water Joke," by J. F. Sullivan.

6d. Published on the first of each month. 6d.

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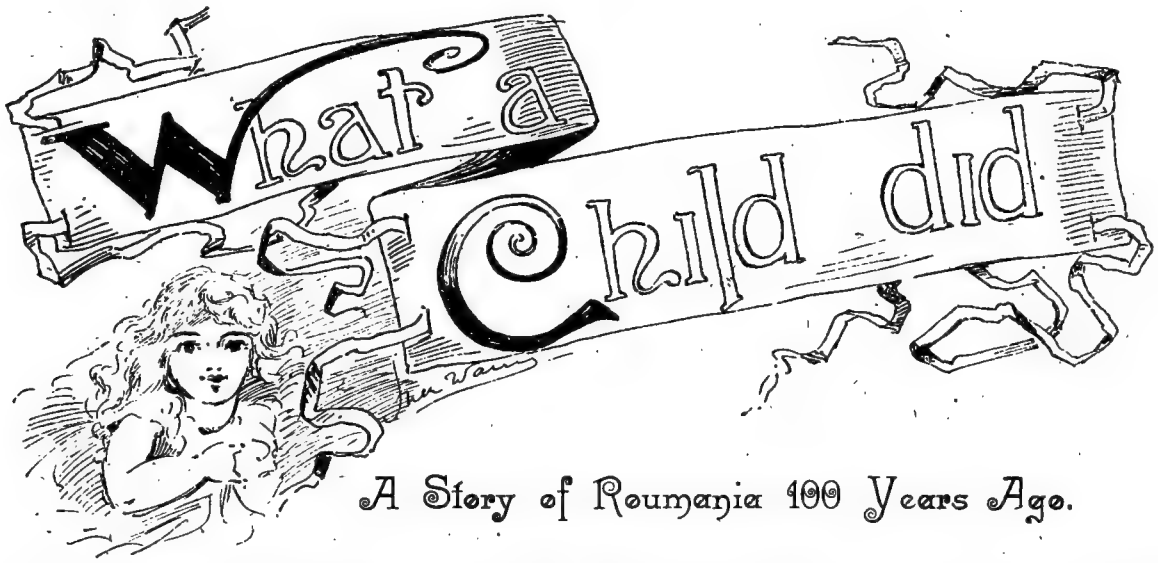

A Story of Roumania 100 Years Ago.

I am decidedly fond of antiquities (I'm old myself now); that is to say, I am an amateur antiquarian. I am not quite sure that I should care to be a professional one. If I were rich and *could* devote all my time to antiquarian researches, it is quite probable that my love for them would cool; but as I have to pay strict attention to my business during the ordinary hours of labour, and can only ride my hobby during a small portion of the week, my enthusiasm increases rather than diminishes. I would go miles to see an old book, coin or vase; I am often at the British Museum; I have spent many a ten minutes gazing at the Needle; and if any magazine or book contains merely an illustration of something ancient, it fetches me at once. (Well! I've written it now, so I trust that I—an antiquarian!—may be pardoned for using so modern a term as "fetch.")

My firm does business in most of the countries of Europe, and as I have all the principal languages at my fingers' ends—it's quite a gift, of course—I do a good deal of the foreign correspondence myself. It's practice, you see. In the course of the past three years I have succeeded in scraping acquaintance (I believe that expression is sufficiently antiquated) with the principals of several foreign firms and have thereby been able to add to my museum. The head of a certain Roumanian firm, by name Licherdopol, is a man of tastes similar to my own, and as I was able to do him an exceedingly good turn a short time ago, we have become great friends. He would insist upon my accepting some token of gratitude, and last week I received a perfect treasure in the shape of a manuscript, yellow with age, and much worn and torn. It must have cost him a pang to part with it. I tell you it would take a lot of money to get it away from *me!*

As will be seen, the manuscript is the work of an eye-witness—an old man, with just enough learning to be able to write down, in a mixed language, what he saw, and his impressions thereon. The parchment being worn, there are gaps in the story, but Mr. Licherdopol's particulars happily enable me to supply what is lacking. In this form I place it before you.

* * * * * *

I am full of years, and the time cannot be far distant when I shall leave all this trouble behind. I have lived through terrible times, and I pray nightly that I may be spared the pain of passing through much more of this tribulation. Battle, robbery, murder, the arbitrary taking of life by those who have might on their side, the violation of all that is sacred—all this is of everyday occurrence. I am tired—oh, so tired of it! Yet to-day I have witnessed that which engenders within me the hope that all the goodness has not gone out of my fellow-man. Perhaps I am wrong; an old dotard, they would call me. Nevertheless, it is so different from what we see day by day that I feel impelled to make use of the little learning I possess to set down the events of this day. Learning! It will be a relief to put mine to some use; many a time have I cursed it, for it renders the feelings more acute, and has made me more unhappy in the midst of these troubles than those who cannot use the quill.

I will tell it just as it happened. Toudor Vladimiresco, the brave defender of Roumanian rights and privileges, after having driven back the hordes of Ypsilanti, had decided to fix his headquarters in our village for the winter. Of course, there was great excitement in the village. It is a grand thing to have valiant defenders of the Fatherland, but the pandours had gained a reputation which made the villagers ask themselves—and ask one another in whispers—whether it was worse to be pillaged by the enemy or "protected" by the pandours!

Toudor was against all such excesses as his men were known to have been guilty of, but he could not entirely stop them. He was a terrible disciplinarian, and strung up the men for the slightest act of disobedience, but outrages of all kinds were committed without the culprits being traced. On the march from Bucharest to Golesti he had ordered ten men to be hanged because he suspected that they had been concerned in a robbery and outrage which had been reported to him. This was such an arbitrary act that even his pandours, who were usually in mortal fear of him, began to murmur. His next act aroused a spirit of rebellion in some of his officers, and this led to what I alluded to at the beginning. Finding that his orders were disregarded by the men when there was the least chance of doing so without detection, he issued an order to his officers that he

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Marin's sweetheart struggling despairingly in the grasp of two men.

should hold them responsible for any offence committed by the men, and he demanded that they should sign a document accepting the responsibility. No doubt he thought that the officers would thus be compelled to look more closely after the men, but such an arbitrary step was quite without parallel, even for Toudor Vladimiresco, and there were many murmurs of resentment.

I was near a group of the men, trying to sell a few things, when Toudor's orderly approached the officer—a handsome young man—with a paper for him to sign, making him responsible.

I saw the young fellow's eyes flash indignantly as the orderly held out the paper and said something which I could not catch.

"If Toudor Vladimiresco wishes to haul us up to the nearest tree," the officer exclaimed in a voice of mingled scorn and anger, "he is able to work his will upon us without asking our permission. We are not bound to sign our lives away!"

He snatched the sheet from the hand of the orderly, tore it into small pieces, and threw them down.

Oh, it was a grand sight to see him standing there, a picture of manly dignity, his head thrown back and his piercing eyes fixed on the face of Toudor's messenger, who looked quite dazed at the audacity of Marin Tanase. But even as I gazed with admiration upon him my heart sank within me, for I knew the fate in store for him. Toudor Vladimiresco suffered no disobedience.

The messenger went away towards the house in which the leader had taken up his abode, while Marin left the men and strolled off in the opposite direction. My work required that I should go into the next village, but I could not leave the neighbourhood. I felt constrained by some unseen force to keep near Toudor's dwelling in order to see what came of the act of rebellion I had witnessed. My heart grew heavy with grief for Marin and his affianced bride, both of whom I had known from childhood; evil would come of it, I was convinced, and I would cheerfully have given my life to have saved him. Others were of the same opinion; they had had experience of Toudor's discipline, and they waited about expecting to see a guard sent out to fetch the rebel. But there was no movement.

As time went on and nothing occurred, I began to feel relieved. It was strange that Vladimiresco should take no notice of an act of insubordination, but I thought that it might well be due to the restraining influence of intercourse with his wife and child. For, having taken up his winter quarters, it meant rest from warfare until the spring, unless something unforeseen should cause the enemy to make a move in spite of the time of the year. So Toudor has sent for his wife and his three-year-old daughter—they say he is passionately fond of her, although he does not think much of her mother—and no doubt means to enjoy their society.

It was about four o'clock when I heard that Vladimiresco was holding a council or something of that kind in the Willow Walk. There is plenty of room for a large assembly of men in the Walk, it was close to his abode, and it would not be dusk till five o'clock, so that there was nothing extraordinary in the fact that he was holding a council; but my heart was seized with a sudden fear when Gianta, who told me the news, added that Marin, who had been walking with his sweetheart, had been specially summoned to attend.

I hurried to the Walk as fast as my old legs would carry me, and this is what I saw.

Toudor Vladimiresco with his chief officer standing in the centre of a circular clearing in the Walk; Marin with his back to a tree, his hands tied, and the noose of a rope around his neck, the rope having been thrown over a stout bough; Anica, Marin's sweetheart, struggling despairingly in the grasp of two men who were preventing her from approaching her lover; and the pandours forming a circle all round.

"Take her away!" I heard Vladimiresco cry, as (by the kindness of some of the men who knew me) I managed to get near enough to witness all. "We want no women here!" Then, as two other men were coming forward to assist, he suddenly changed his mind. "Let her stay, but see that she does not interrupt!" he said brutally. "She shall see how we punish insubordination!"

Anica, quite exhausted, fell upon her knees and hid her face in her hands. Marin's face was deadly pale and his lips twitched. I know it was not fear, because his eyes were blazing defiance; it was the suffering of Anica which upset him. I saw a spot of blood on his upper lip, and Donaro has told me that Toudor himself struck Marin for having called him a cur! So what could the poor boy do? He could only wait for death; to have asked Toudor to put an end to him quickly would have been useless, because Vladimiresco wished to inspire fear in the hearts of others who might have a desire to rebel against his orders.

"Tighten the rope a little!" ordered the leader. Two men drew the noose just tight enough to be irksome.

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A moan of despair came from Anica, but Marin never flinched.

"Marin Tanase," said Vladimiresco, addressing the doomed man, "you have been guilty of insubordination, and must die."

He stopped for a moment, and then I saw just the shadow of a fiendish smile cross his face.

"There is one way of saving your life," he continued. "Down on your knees and crave pardon, and you shall go free."

Anica looked up at her lover half-expectantly. But Marin shouted "Never!" with a vehemence that was not to be mistaken.

"Then pray for your soul, for in thirty seconds you will be swinging from that branch," said Toudor savagely.

The men pulled the rope tight, in readiness for the order from the leader. Marin's lips moved slightly as if in prayer. We were all waiting to hear the word from Vladimiresco, when something unexpected happened.

A little girl of three, with a look of distress upon her face, Vladimiresco's daughter, came tripping forward into the clearing, looking this way and that way with the natural curiosity of an intelligent child. How did she come there? Was it the finger of Providence? Her attention was attracted in some way towards Marin. She walked up to him, and looked at him earnestly.

"Does it hurt you?" asked the child.

"Poor man!" said the little one with childish sympathy. "Is you ill?"

Marin could only stare at her. Anica sprang to her feet, her breath coming in pants.

"Does it hurt you?" asked the child after a pause, the treble voice betraying some anxiety.

Still no reply. Our glances went from the child to the father, who was staring in perplexity at the strange scene.

"Take it off!" continued the little girl. Then as Marin did not move, she said in a reassuring tone: "Me take it off for you!"

She reached up towards his neck, but finding that it was too high up, she pulled at him to drag him on to his knees. The men involuntarily loosened the rope and Marin, scarcely knowing what he did, knelt down in front of her.

Little Jeanne put her tiny fingers on the rope and made a childish endeavour to loosen it. I looked around instinctively and shall never forget the sight. I am not scholar enough to describe it. Marin, a slight flush on his cheeks, a gleam of hope in his eyes; Anica, her arms outstretched towards her lover and the child, held back by the two men; Toudor Vladimiresco, perplexed and uneasy; and the pandours watching expectantly.

"I *can't!*" exclaimed the little one, the tears starting to her eyes. She turned and ran up to her father. "Papa," she said, in the imperious tone of a spoiled child, "poor man ill. It *hurts* him. *You* take it off, papa! *Come!*" And she tugged at his tunic with all her strength.

His love for Jeanne was about the only soft spot in Vladimiresco's heart. He would have been inhuman indeed to have resisted that appeal. He followed the child—still tugging at his coat—to where Marin was still kneeling.

"*This*, papa. Take it *off!*" exclaimed Jeanne, pulling at the rope.

Toudor hesitated. The two men looked for a moment into each other's eyes. Then Vladimiresco loosened the noose, slipped it over Marin's head and threw it violently over the bough so that it fell in a heap on the other side.

"Your life is spared," he said abruptly. "Go away, and let me see you no more!"

He turned on his heel and strode away. Marin started to his feet, bewildered at what had taken place. Anica, released by her guards, rushed forward and hugged the child to her breast.

* * * * * *

And there the writing ends. It is rather an abrupt termination, but from the particulars given to me by Mr. Licherdopol, I am able to complete the story. Vladimiresco fell into the hands of the Greeks shortly afterwards, and was put to death without mercy. That is a fact.

Concerning Marin and Anica there is no absolutely authentic information, but tradition says that they removed to another part of Roumania, and married, Marin giving up soldiering, and becoming a farmer. After the death of Vladimiresco, and that of his wife a few months later, they adopted little Jeanne.

G. D.

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Wanted—A Husband.

The following "personal" might have been seen all that summer on the fourth page of a prominent journal:

WANTED.—A young lady residing in the provinces, pretty and distinguished, with a *dot* of three hundred thousand francs, desires to marry a gentleman of about thirty-five years, one in the military or legal profession preferred, who resides in Paris. No agencies.—Address, Madeline T. T., Box 333, this office.

Not every statement in the above advertisement was perfectly true. Elodie Rabotteau, the party referred to, was a young lady to be sure, and is so still, more's the pity. She also resides in the country still, for her father is a judge at Saint Colomban, an obscure town in the Canton of Beauce.

But, between ourselves—first, she was not pretty; second, she was not at all distinguished; third, the above-mentioned three hundred thousand francs are principally expectations from her uncle—a bachelor, it is true, but scarcely forty years of age, and solid as a rock.

As to the "No agencies," that was a base deception. "Madeline T. T., box 333," was really Theodore Tardivel, whose trade it was to arrange matrimonial bargains; but he had recognised the fact that certain clients have an insurmountable prejudice against matrimonial agencies. There are people who for the world would not get into a hackney coach on account of the licence number on it.

"Tardivel has written me a long letter," said Judge Rabotteau to his wife, one morning of last autumn. "Here is his plan. The army manœuvres commence a week from now, and Saint Colomban has been designated to provide quarters for a half-battery of artillery. This half-battery is commanded by Captain Lecomte, and Captain Lecomte wishes to marry a young lady who has been brought up in the country. Now, don't think of anything but making the house look its best. To-morrow you must take Elodie to Chateaudun, and have a new gown made for her. At the same time you can send for a man to tune the piano. We must have a second girl, too, so that the cook will not have to wait at table."

"Goodness!" gasped Madame Rabotteau; "what an expense!"

"I do not deny that it is quite a considerable outlay. But do you, or do you not, want Elodie married? She's twenty-six now, and for the past eight years we have offered her to every bachelor in the country round, to say nothing of widowers. Now a chance offers itself, and we must profit by it. So, old lady, you must bestir yourself. I shall go and fix it with the mayor, so that they quarter the captain on us."

When the first of September came cannons sounded all the morning long through the vast plains that surround Saint Colomban, and towards four o'clock in the afternoon the approach of the half-battery was announced.

Presently the captain appeared at the whitewashed gate, that served as a boundary for Judge Rabotteau's terrestial paradise. The *mise en scène* had been arranged beforehand; Rabotteau, under the spreading acacia tree, was reading the *Revue des Deux Mondes*; his wife, not afar away, was cutting bunches of grapes from the yellowing trellis, and behind the white muslin curtains of the parlour window, Elodie, warned by a preconcerted signal, burst, with the energy of despair, into a love song.

At the sound of the horse's shoes clattering on the paved walk, the Judge put down his review and his wife abandoned her grapes.

The Captain stood before them, cap in hand.

"Madame," he began, with a bow, "allow me to introduce myself. I am——"

"You are known to us already, M. Lecomte. We were expecting you."

The officer bowed and smiled, and shook hands with Rabotteau. Then he was led to the parlour, to the great confusion of Elodie, who suddenly cut short her song, blushing as if she had been a hundred miles from suspecting that an artillery captain was to set foot, that day, within the limits of the canton in which her father administered justice.

The Captain discreetly suggested that he would take his meals at the hotel, but they soon made him understand that that would be an unpardonable insult.

"You must share our modest fare," Madame Rabotteau told him; "we shall not break an egg the more for you."

It is unnecessary to say that the dinner was a feast. By dessert the four people assembled seemed to have known each other for ten years, and the Captain made a conquest of them all.

At ten o'clock he asked permission to retire.

"Of course, dear M. Lecomte," said Madame Rabotteau, "after having such a fatiguing journey, I hope you will sleep well under our modest roof."

In the privacy of the nuptial chamber the husband and wife exchanged their impressions.

"It's just a dream!" the lady declared. "He has such an air of breeding and such perfect manners! Not the least bit like a noisy soldier. And I'm sure the man must have a fortune. He gave forty sous to the constable who showed him the way to the house."

"There is nothing surprising in that, my dear. One can see he is a graduate at the Polytechnic School. They are gentlemen—sober, serious, well-behaved. Did you hear that he had the good taste not to make the least allusion to his matrimonial intentions?"

In the morning, at four o'clock, when the Captain went down to mount his horse, the Judge was waiting for him to take breakfast. That evening there was new repetition of the follies of Balthasar. Lecomte politely asked the fair Elodie to play for him; then, in his turn, the young man was invited to sing. He accepted without hesitation, and he had a superb voice. Next he played one of Mendelssohn's "Songs without Words" with undeniable talent.

A couple of days later, Rabotteau discreetly brought up the subject of officers marrying, and pretended to decry it. Lecomte smiled significantly, and politely opposed his host's theories. He added that during the war

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the married officers had performed their duty better, if possible, than the others.

That night, not a member of the family slept a wink, Elodie least of all.

"Well, it ought to go through this time," Madame Rabotteau declared to her husband, "for according to my calculations, this week has cost us at least four hundred francs."

"You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs," the Judge replied sententiously.

He had secretly written to Tardivel:

Lecomte is charming. He suits us to a T. Is it necessary to give him a hint?

And Tardivel replied:

Pretend to know nothing about it. When he comes back, I will see him. I will manage the whole affair.

However, the last day of the manœuvres had come. That evening, the Rabotteau kitchen was nerved for a supreme effort, destined to all appearances, to be crowned with success. But, alas! at the accustomed hour the Captain's horse was brought back to the stable by his orderly.

Elodie, who was watching for the return of her future husband—they called him so already among themselves—from behind her blinds, flew to the garden and cried out in anguish:

"Merciful heavens! Is he wounded?"

"No, Mademoiselle," replied the orderly, with a peculiar smile. "The Captain's health is *in statu quo*. But you'd better tell your papa not to keep the soup waiting for him."

"Isn't he coming to dinner?"

"No, Mademoiselle; he is going to have dinner at the White Horse Inn, and will sleep there afterwards. I am to fetch his things as soon as I have unsaddled the mare."

Pale as a sheet, Elodie ran to inform her mother.

"Goodness!" cried the latter; "what a pity. That goose cost eight francs! But what is the matter? Shall we ask his orderly?"

"We shall do nothing of the sort, my dear," replied the Judge. "Thanks to the influence of discipline and the guardhouse, these military servants will do anything for their masters. You would learn nothing, and you might spoil everything perhaps. To-morrow I shall make inquiries."

The dinner of the trio was most melancholy.

Early the next day Rabotteau sought out the landlord of the White Horse, who was much flurried by the presence of a dozen officers of all grades.

"Can you tell me," the Judge asked, "if the artillery captain who was quartered at my house—— "

"He is in No. 8, Judge. The Captain is still in his room, for the manœuvres ended last night. Excuse me if I do not take you up myself—I am just worked to death."

Rabotteau ascended the stairs, and strode down the long corridor, on which opened several white doors, all alike except for the large numerals painted on them in black. He was just in the act of knocking at that which bore the figure eight, when suddenly he recoiled as if he had seen a tiger crouching on the mat. It was, by the side of a pair of top boots, still armed with spurs, a little pair of shoes, lined with rose-coloured satin; dainty, elegant, impertinent shoes; shoes of which one would say without fear of being mistaken: "The foot of a pretty woman was in that not long ago."

Yes, but for the time being the pretty woman was—somewhere else. Unhappy Elodie! Poor Madame Rabotteau! Fool of a Tardivel! Shameless monster of a Lecomte!

At that moment the key was heard to turn in the door of No. 8. The door was seen to open timidly, just the least crack. First a hand emerged, very small and very white, the hand that belonged to those shoes. Then the wrist appeared, round and slender, with a pretty bracelet. Then a plump arm, which grew longer and longer. Rabotteau had never in his life seen such an arm as that, and, if the other were like it, as all experience would indicate, this scoundrel of a Lecomte was a very lucky scoundrel indeed.

However, the arm, the wrist, the hand, and the shoes retreated in good order. The door was closed, and the Judge stood there, feeling very foolish, but there was nothing for him to do but to go back to his own house.

"Well?" simultaneously cried the two women, who were waiting for him on the way.

"That Lecomte is a scoundrel," he said between his teeth. "Go to your room, Elodie, I have something to say to your mother."

Then Rabotteau, with shining eyes—from anger, no doubt—recounted to his better half what he had seen.

"Oh!" gasped the good lady, "the idea of such a scandal! This is a pretty example for Saint Colomban! Whatever shall we tell Elodie? Poor child, she really liked the monster! And a pretty fellow is your Tardivel. That reminds me, a letter has just come from him by special courier."

On the table, indeed, the Judge found his missive:

I don't understand this at all. You pretend to have Lecomte there with you. But he writes me that he had broken his leg, and that one of his comrades had taken his place in the manœuvres. Pray send me some word of explanation.

"This is too much!" cried Elodie's mother. "I called him M. Lecomte all the time, and he never denied the name. If I were you, I would write to the Minister of War about it."

"I shall think it over," Rabotteau said. "It is a grave matter to have an officer court-martialed on account of a young man's escapade. Besides, he will not leave, I imagine, without coming to say good-bye, and then we shall see."

Surely enough, that afternoon the false Lecomte knocked at the gate. But—climax of impudence!—on his arm was a young and very pretty woman—doubtless the lady of the shoes.

"Justine!" cried Madame Rabotteau, "do not open the gate! Tell those persons we are not at home." Then, turning to her husband, she added: "Why are you not choking with indignation? Can you stand unmoved in the face of such insult? If I were a man, M. Rabotteau, matters would look very different."

"But, my dear, I am a magistrate, I am sixty-seven years of age, and the manipulation of arms is an unknown art to me."

At that moment Justine returned, carrying a card on which was inscribed:

Le Comte de Prebois,
Capitaine d'Artillerie.

Beneath was written in pencil:

A thousand regrets and a thousand excuses for having missed your company last evening. Madame de Prebois came down and took me by surprise, and did not wish to seem inconsiderate by increasing the trouble my presence has caused you. It would have afforded her great pleasure to make the acquaintance of your wife and daughter. Allow me to express my sincere gratitude for your excellent hospitality.

"I understand now," Madame Rabotteau declared at last, with a profoundly discouraged sigh, after she had read the card through, "why he did not object when we called him, Monsieur le Comte. Poor Elodie. She always was unlucky."

Le Vier.

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THE TREASURES OF THE WHITE GOD.

THE STORY OF A SHAMEFUL CRIME.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Retribution.

Richard Sheldon did not stop at a single victim in his mad resolve for flight. A second time he raised the knife.

It was swept from his grasp, however. In his free hand Detective Dean still retained the pair of handcuffs. He struck out wildly as the merchant bent over him, dealt his knuckles a rap that swept the knife from his grasp, and then struggled frantically to drag himself free from the encumbering form of the senseless Burgoyne and the box.

With a snarl of ferocity, Sheldon drew his revolver. He aimed it point-blank at the face of his prostrate foe, pulled the trigger, and then, not even waiting to note the effect, madly hurled the weapon at Dean, and sprang from the spot.

Clutching the handbag tightly, he ran down the line. The train was gaining speed. It would not stop for two hundred miles again. Dead or alive, he would trust to outwitting Dean by pursuing his journey on the express, at least as far as the next point of halting.

He saw at a glance that he must run and meet the train ere it gained a momentum it would scarcely be safe to defy. He poised himself as the engine dashed by. As soon as the engine and tender had passed him, he would grasp at the door rail of the next passenger carriage.

Thud! Just as the tender rushed by him, a heavy object left the hand of the man in charge of it—a letter bag. It was usual to throw it off here regularly.

It took the unwarned, unprepared Sheldon in the chest. Head over heels he went, the breath fairly knocked out of his body. He landed with a shock that stunned every sense. Then he staggered to his feet, limping, bruised, bleeding, and stared, with a wild malediction, down the smooth lines, to see the flickering red lights of the rear carriage of the express vanishing round a curve, half a mile away.

So vanished hope? No! He reflected eagerly. The Central ran a mile east. There was a train due at the nearest station in an hour; he remembered that. Why not catch it? Without a further thought of Dean or Burgoyne, the fugitive started, as fast as he could run, across an open field, at the extreme end of which he could even now make out the signals.

"What was that?"

He quivered, he glanced apprehensively behind him—half a mile accomplished. The sound of clattering feet on the hard, baked path he had been pursuing.

A great cry of mingled dismay and alarm swept his lips as he strained his eyes to make out a rapidly advancing figure.

"Mercy! it is Dean!"

Yes; the recognition was unmistakable. Even as he gazed, a sharp, peremptory challenge cut the air like a knife.

"Halt!"

The fugitive drew another revolver.

Bang—snap—snap—snap!—three chambers empty—bang—bang!

He threw away the useless weapon, with a cry like that of an environed tiger denuded of its claws. His pursuer must bear a charmed life! Relentless as fate, unscathed, he swept towards the pursued man.

Sheldon ran on. Here, in the open space, it was a question of superior speed. Well, he was no ordinary sprinter! Could he but reach the extensive yards just beyond a bridge spanning a little stream directly in his course, a score of secure hiding-places offered protection.

Half-way across the bridge he came to a dismayed halt. He could hear the breath of the pursuer, sharp, panting, but resolute. A firm hand grasped him.

Like a beast at bay, the fugitive glared at his captor.

"I am armed—no resistance, if you are wise!" sounded the stern voice of Dean. "Give me that bag!"

The bag? Ah! a malevolent and then a hopeful gleam shone in the eyes of the captive.

Liberty was everything. To be imprisoned now meant doom—the forgeries discovered, his own coward course certain to accord with the claims of this intrepid, relentless man-hunter.

"The bag?" he panted hoarsely. "Yes—take it!"

He gave it a sudden fling over the bridge rail, directly into the water beneath.

With an ejaculation of infinite dismay, taken completely off his guard, the detective relaxed his hold of Sheldon.

He saw the swift-rolling waters of the river; he saw that, by sheer accident, the precious handbag had landed on a frail heap of driftwood, that a minute later might float out of sight, or sink. He followed a quick impulse. Over the rail he sprang into the cold dark waters. He splashed, caught at the bag, clung to it, and struck out for the shore.

The temporary respite afforded the fugitive was seized with avidity. He ran on swiftly. It was liberty now—never mind the treasure! Had he not several thousand pounds in his pocket? Life, free, even with that niggardly portion, was better than a prison cell and nothing.

Ah! the yard at last!—network and wilderness of rails, ties, engines and carriages. A hundred safe places of concealment offered; numberless trains passed the vicinity nightly.

He looked back. Possession of the treasure and a cold bath had apparently dampened the ardour of Detective Dean, for he was nowhere in sight.

The fugitive was breathless, nearly exhausted from his violent run. A bitter smile crossed his pale face as he realised, pantingly, that he was no longer a young man. His prime had been reached through fast living; his keen craftiness had been blunted by recent blunders.

A sharp pain near the heart caused him to press his hand there. He winced, gasped a trifle harder, and then sat down upon a pile of iron.

"I've overtaxed myself," he muttered, with concern. "The run, the excitement, have been too much for me. Dr. Ridgely said I must be careful. Only a few paltry thousands, after all my scheming!"

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A grim, sullen look came into his pain-stricken eyes as he drew forth a pocket-book and opened it, to be sure of its contents. The glare of a danger lamp turned a flood of a lurid hue across his face at that moment and made it look ghastly.

At that moment, too, a second spasm of pain gripped his heart. He sank back sideways on the heap to ease the contraction of the tense muscles, and then reached forth his hand to take up the pocket-book which had fallen from his grasp.

"Hello! I don't like this!"

His face, bloodless, and alarmed now, the fugitive plotter thrilled as his arm refused to do his bidding. It was becoming nerveless. A deadening numbness, too, had crept up one side, and the muscles of his mouth began to twitch.

"It's just the reaction from excitement! I must rouse myself!" he muttered.

A groan parted his lips. A strange, dull throbbing began to pervade his brain; little thrills of alternate chill and heat traversed his nerves, and then——

Foaming at the mouth, he tried to shout for help, but the utterance click-clacked down in his throat. His hands spread out in fan-shape rigidity as he essayed to rise. An awful shock, as of some mighty concussion, jarred every nerve; then, like a blight, like a breath, a fearful convulsion sent him huddled to a helpless heap.

Helpless in the hour of triumph—stricken down at the moment of safety! His money lay, of no avail, at his side.

What had happened? His brain became more active, as his frame grew more sodden, death-like, rigid.

The fixed, awful eyes told the story—the limp limbs revealed the truth. In the height of wicked victory and soulless flight from the wrongs he had done others, it had come——

The hand of Heaven—paralysis!

CHAPTER XXXV.

At Eventide—Light.

Adrian Burgoyne had been desperately wounded by the knife-thrust of the fugitive man.

The detective had managed to push his encumbering body aside and get free of the heavy box. Then he had to run to the station-master's office, utter a hurried injunction to him to care for the wounded man, and had started on the track of Sheldon.

But, amid the bustle of the arriving train, the station-master lost several minutes. When he reached the corner of the sanguinary encounter, Burgoyne had disappeared.

In later hours, Convict 407 could never trace his movements of that fateful evening, nor analyse the false strength that enabled him to wander for miles.

The flow of blood had ceased, but the shock had sent a fierce delirium to his brain. He must have staggered from the lines, reached a street near by, and, with one thought supreme in his mind, groped his way back towards the city.

Patrice! Her name alone haunted his fevered lips. Sheldon, the treasure, the detective, were all in the remote background now. Patrice—ever Patrice—only Patrice!

Men whom he met stared, startled at his dabbled attire, at his white face, his wild eyes. One pedestrian consented to examine the paper, bloodstained and outspread, which Burgoyne presented.

It was the order to release "the niece of Richard Sheldon." It bore the address of the institution.

The man directed him. Talking to himself, laughing, scowling, murmuring soft, sentimental nothings one moment, the next growing tragic over some more dramatic phase of his lightning-like thoughts, the wounded wayfarer reeled forward on his way.

Utter delirium was regnant now, save for that one coherent idea—Patrice. It was two hours after leaving the station that Burgoyne came to his journey's end. He had staggered down a narrow, tree-lined street. Only the pale moonlight, filtering through the leaves, illuminated the spot, showing a high brick wall, without a break, until he came to a stout oaken door set in the solid masonry.

Upon the step of this he sank. Not a soul was in sight. Only the distant hum of the city's turmoil haunted the still, evening air.

His senses were swaying, his wound had broken out afresh. The loss of new, hot blood cooled the fevered pulses for the moment. A flush of reality, a transient conception of his condition, flashed over Burgoyne's mind.

As he realised his situation, his peril, his weakness, he essayed to rise. He managed to gain his feet by crowding into the niche formed by the set-in gate. Upon it he knocked.

"Open—help!" he murmured faintly, with no idea of what the gate might lead to.

There was a click as he continued his knocking. He had loosened a little wicket in the centre of the gate. It slipped down.

A hundred sweet perfumes crossed his senses. Through the aperture his fever-driven eyes caught a glimpse of the swaying trees and bushes of a garden. What was the place? Was not that a form moving among the shrubbery?

To sustain himself, he thrust his arm through the wicket. There he clung, his arm bared by grazing the aperture, Richard Sheldon's bloodstained order still fluttering in his hand.

"Help! I am wounded—dying——"

"What is this? Sister Ursula, something has happened! Quick, this way!"

That voice! Was he dreaming, delirious again?

"It is a man. He has a bloodstained paper in his hand. Sister, what does it mean? Adrian! The tattooed arm! Oh! am I dreaming—mad?"

That voice! *Her* voice! Clinging to the wicket, limp, broken, dying, like a tempest-tossed mariner to a rock of safety, the stricken Adrian Burgoyne knew that a soft, anguished touch caressed his hand—knew that by accident, circumstance, fate, he had found his missing love—smiled once in joy delirious, and then mind and heart floated into the mysterious dreamland of insensibility.

* * * * *

One day! ten!—how much older was the world than the night he so nearly met his fate, he knew not, as he opened his eyes to life and light and love again.

He lay upon a soft couch in a pleasant room; balmy zephyrs swept through its open windows; at his side hovered an angel.

"Patrice!"

Down upon her knees beside him, sobbing, laughing, crying, sank the wrapt, anxious nurse.

"Oh! you are better; you will live! Adrian—you know me?"

"What does it mean—where am I?"

Soft as the whispering cadence of a summer zephyr came the words in reply. Her eyes riveted upon his face, Patrice Ringold told how fate had sent him to the reformatory, how he had been taken in and cared for by the kind-hearted sisters, how she had been his nurse.

"Dean—does he know? Is he still alive?" quivered Burgoyne anxiously.

"He has been here daily. Oh! there is so much to tell. Do not become excited dear! You shall know all in time, only—oh! my brave, loyal friend, he even has crowned your heroic endeavours with blessings. What most in the world would please you, encourage you, hasten your recovery?"

"Your love!" sighed the ardent patient.

"That is yours to the end of time," murmured the blushing Patrice. "But here is something more practical.

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Shut your eyes, dear! Open your eyes, dear! and—look!"

Her own sparkled like diamonds as she fluttered a paper before his vision.

"What is it?" asked Adrian Burgoyne faintly.

"Read and see—*a pardon!*"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

The End of a Long Chase.

OFFICIAL REPORT.

DEPARTMENT OF POLICE.

1st District: 4th Precinct. Police Station: Central Headquarters.

Evidences of Crime.

Documents—Affidavits. Recovered Property.

Appended a medico-legal report.

In the case of Richard Sheldon, I have to report, in addition to previous disclosures, the death of the accused, and the final establishment of the innocence of Convict 407, Adrian Burgoyne.

Every detail of the plots of Sheldon have already been forwarded you. They form the story of the wrongs perpetrated against an innocent man—Adrian Burgoyne. They prove the deep villainy of the man Sheldon.

This man was found paralysed near the scene of his attempted murder. He was conveyed, helpless, to the city hospital, and died there yesterday, after reluctantly affixing his signature to the inclosed confession, which, with the certificate of the attending physician, I forward you.

It now only remains for justice to rehabilitate Adrian Burgoyne and establish Miss Patrice Ringold in her rights as owner of the treasure and moneys wrested from Sheldon. The private detective, Davenant, I find innocent of any conjunction in Sheldon's plots. He, furthermore, revealed to me the whereabouts of Miss Ringold, who is now nursing the man who imperilled his life to shield my own.

I have this day placed in her hands a full and complete pardon from the Governor of the State, for Adrian Burgoyne. This was secured upon the presentation to His Excellency of papers she had secretly abstracted from the desk of Colonel Lytle. They prove the plot to connect Burgoyne with the anarchist murder, they fully and completely verify my claims as to his entire innocence.

In closing the case, sir, I thank you for the expressions of confidence and commendation your last communication offers me.

(Signed) Berwyn L. Dean, *Detective.*

Upon reading this final and informal report of his subordinate, the chief of the service, Grey, sent for Dean.

"You have made a mistake in your report, Dean," he announced.

"Eh! how?" murmured the other, bewildered.

"There is a correction to be made in the signature. There. That reads better!"

The chief drew a pencil across the report as he spoke. Then he tossed it to his subordinate.

And the flushed and delighted officer, who had been true to his employers, and true to himself, read the gratifying chronicle of merit rewarded, of promotion and esteem—"Berwyn L. Dean, *Inspector.*"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

The World's Fair Mystery.

The city of Chicago was mad with delight, riotous with excitement, aglow with bright faces, flags, banners and transparencies.

Four hundred years had woven the slow-filling warp and woof of progress with steady unfaltering fingers, and the wilderness Columbus had descried from the deck of his beleaguered ship, rang from ocean to ocean with commemorative cheers.

The great World's Fair was ready to spread its rare treasures of art, science and industry to the view of pilgrims from the four corners of the earth.

In a safe corner of one of its massive buildings had been stored a curio, around which romance and tragedy had woven a mystery that endowed it with more than ordinary interest in the eyes of the curious public.

It was the White God — Richard Sheldon's gift to the Columbian Exposition.

The story of that idol had filled the papers, had been discussed by every lip, had, as well, involved the romance of the pardoned convict and heiress orphan.

Thousands had begged for a sight of it; but in vain. It was announced that it would only be publicly seen when the Mexican exhibit was complete and in place.

That promise, however, was never fulfilled, and one morning the World's Fair officials awoke to confront a mighty surprise, a bewildering mystery.

The White God was gone!

The puzzled detectives who haunted the grounds after the discovery of this daring theft, looked wise, but said nothing, did nothing, for the abstraction of the idol had been the work of too deft a hand that a single clue to the bold depredator should be discovered.

The thief had evaded the guards on duty. He had climbed a ladder to the roof of the building in which the idol was housed.

With extraordinary patience, he had swung from girder to girder, had attached a rope to the idol, swung it aloft, laboriously dragged it four hundred feet across the net-work of iron beams, and, taking his life in his hands, had lowered it and himself over the sheer edge of the rotunda to the ground below.

Then the audacious marauder and the White God disappeared.

Mr. Inspector Dean looked grim when he heard of it. He thought of Medeiras and his vengeance, and said nothing.

Somewhat later, a friend from Mexico described to him a great Aztec festival he had witnessed at the cave of Bureldo.

The high priest in charge of the ceremonies he described. It was Medeiras. The festivities marked the return to its rifled shrine of the famous White God.

And in its gleaming brow there glittered and shone the yellow sun-jewel wrested from the possession of dead Colonel Lytle in the moment of the dread vengeance of the relentless devotee of the White God.

* * * * * * *

Moonlight on the water, one great glare of electric radiance on the land—a placid lake, a park of green; domes, spires and minarets—a picture of fairyland enchantment—the great World's Fair at Chicago!

From the deck of a stately steamer on the lake, their hands clasped, their eyes sentient with glowing thoughts, two congenial souls watched all this magnificence.

In silence! The scene was too vivid with memories of the past, too eloquent with suggestions of the future, to admit of commonplace discussion.

Here, these two, the Englishman, Adrian Burgoyne and Patrice, his wife, had been fated by destiny to find the starting-point in their career, that had led them, surely, inevitably, through deep waters, to the sure sunlight of later happiness.

Here the long chase had begun; here it ended. Thousands from every land would view the majestic scene, wonder-eyed, entranced by its material splendour, but, to that devoted two, the thought of the dash for liberty, of the hunted fugitive, of the wild flames of the burning barge, of the reckless spring into the bubbling billows, of Convict 407, another night like this in the long-ago, sanctified the spot with memories that would continue while life endured.

From that peril, darkness, gloom and wretchedness had been evolved security, light, joy and bliss.

Heaven was kind—Heaven was just! and the man who had never lost his faith, who had battled every dark demon of despair with trust and courage supreme, as he clasped the hand of Patrice, faithful, bonny Patrice, felt that the love he had won was as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land!

The End.

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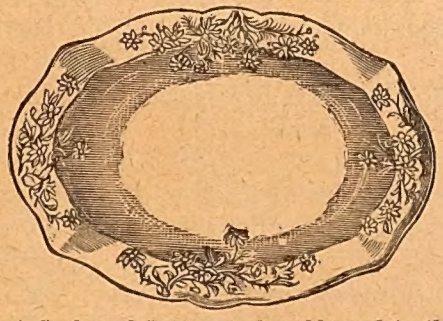

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WE MUST HAVE THE TOOLS.

Robinson Crusoe, you remember, made a big boat or canoe out of the trunk of a tree. It was a laborious and tedious job. And that wasn't the worst of it. When he got the boat done he couldn't launch it. It was too heavy for one man to handle. If he had only had an arrangement like the capstan of a ship he might have managed. He *understood* how to do it, but lacked the tools. How often we find ourselves at a dead stand for that same reason. Let me give you a fresh illustration, tied up for the moment in the following letter, which must first be read before we can rightly come at the point.

"In the spring of 1884," says our correspondent, "I got into a low, weak way, not being able to imagine what had happened to me. My strength kept ebbing away till I had scarcely the desire or ability to do anything. I felt as tired as if I had just arrived home from a long, hard journey, yet no tax more than usual of any kind had been laid upon me. My mind, too, was weary; so that I turned from things that obliged me to think, plan, or consider.

"Side by side, so to speak, with all this was the failure of my appetite. Of course I continued to eat, or make an effort to eat, but food no longer tempted me as it does a person in health. I picked and minced over my meals, and the little I took neither tasted good nor did me any good after I had eaten it. Instead of warming, comforting and stimulating me, as it used to do, it gave me distress at the stomach, pain at the chest, and a singular feeling of tightness around the waist, as though a belt were buckled too snug around me.

"After a time the condition of my stomach seemed to grow worse. There was that sense of gnawing, so often mentioned by others, and occasionally a feeling of faintness and sinking, almost like the ground giving way under one's feet."

[Remark: An eminent London physician, in one of his books, describes this sinking feeling as one of the most appalling and frightful that it is possible to experience. It is not the body but the *mind* that suffers. I, the present writer, have had two attacks of it, and pray to have no more. It is like unto the overshadowing of the Death Angel's wing, *with the mind fully conscious of the situation.* The *cause* is uric acid poison in the blood, one of the products of prolonged indigestion.]

"When this sinking feeling came on," continues the letter, "it weighed me down like a nightmare. Finally I got to be so weak I could only walk slowly and feebly. *The doctor who prescribed for me said my complaint was dyspepsia,* but his medicine had no perceptible effect.

"I continued like this for eight years; not always the same, but now better and then worse. Yet in all that long time there was not a day when I could say I was well. No medicine or treatment seemed right for me, and I almost began to think I never should recover my former health.

"In March, 1892, Mother Seigel's Syrup was recommended to me as having done wonders in cases like mine, even when they were of long standing and everything else had failed. No harm to try it, we thought, and got a bottle from Mr. Grime, the chemist, in Bolton Road; and after taking it I felt great relief. My appetite quickly improved and I could eat without pain. When I had taken two or three bottles more the bad symptoms had all gone, and I was as well as ever. My husband also took the medicine with the same good results. You may publish my letter and refer inquiries to me. (Signed) (Mrs.) Elizabeth Wilson, 5, Northcote Street, Bolton Road, Darwen, March 1st, 1895."

The lesson in this interesting narrative is too plain for us to miss it. Our old friend Crusoe was not able to launch his boat for the want of machinery. Similarly the doctor who attended Mrs. Wilson was not able to cure her because he did not possess the right remedy. His opinion as to her complaint was entirely correct. She was suffering from chronic dyspepsia, precisely as he told her. But alas! it is one thing to know what ought to be done and quite another to have the knowledge and means to do it.

Between these two things (over this wide gap) stands Mother Seigel's Syrup, just as between the two sides of the Thames stands London Bridge.

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